



Dealing with Feelings

Feelings are inevitable for everyone alive. Since we all experience feelings at one point or another it can be helpful to do what we can to reduce the negatives and increase the positives associated with feelings in our lives. The following feeling-based exercises examine what you can do from three perspectives:

1. What can you do now before negative feelings happen? (**Preventing Negative Feelings**)
2. What can you do during an episode when you may be struggling with challenging feelings (**Tolerating and Coping with Difficult Feelings**)
3. What can you do for your future to increase positive feelings and experiences (**Cultivating Positive Feelings for the Future**)

“Strange how complicated we can make things just to avoid showing what we feel!”
— Erich Maria Remarque

Part 1 - Preventing Negative Feelings

Stop Banging Your Head against the Wall

Negative feelings are commonly linked with negative situations in our lives. There are many types negative situation that can occur without warning. These unexpected situations can be referred to as unforeseen occurrences, unfortunate events, or just being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Stuff happens.

There are other negative situations that are the direct or indirect result of our choices. We all make choices in life often knowing the risks involved. Some decisions are worth the risk, but some aren't. Sometimes we make choices knowing ahead of time that the outcome is likely to be bad, yet we may do it anyway. Some simple examples might be smoking cigarettes or driving without a seatbelt. All of us have had the experience of making a decision we later regretted. Everyone has had those moments where it feels like you are banging your head against the wall saying to yourself “Why did I do that (again)?” Unfortunately negative situations with negative outcomes often bring on negative feelings.. Therefore, learning to avoid negative decisions can be an important way to prevent many negative feelings in our lives. *Discuss the following:*

Question for Discussion: Can you think of a situation in your own life where you made a poor decision and later felt like you were banging your head against the wall when you had to deal with the aftermath? Do your best to describe your feelings when this happens.

Example: “Every time I cash my paycheck and then blow most of it within the first two days of getting paid I spend the next 2 weeks feeling regret, guilt and anger”

People rarely change overnight. Often making positive changes is a lot like saving money: Put a little bit aside every few days and over time you eventually have a useful amount saved if you stick with it. With that in mind, if you want to improve your life emotionally, what can you realistically start working on now, even if it you have to start small? Complete the exercise on the following page. (Directions at the bottom)



**11
Things
people may do now,
but often end up
feeling bad about later**

Procrastinating

Impulsivity (acting without thinking)

Getting wrapped up in gossip and drama

Laziness, work avoidance

Making decisions based on emotions

Ignoring or running from your problems

Compulsive behavior (overdoing it)

Overspending

Poor planning

Neglecting to care of yourself

Shortcuts: Cheating or not doing it right the first time by taking the easy way out

**11
Things
to start doing now,
which you will
feel good about later**

Setting priorities

Thinking before acting

Limiting involvement with negative people

Putting in hard work and effort

Choosing after thinking & talking it over

Facing your fears & challenges as they arise

Balance, regularity and self-control

Managing money, budgeting and saving

Setting goals and thinking ahead

Setting aside time for self-care and exercise

Learning to do things the right way then following through until completion

Directions: Review the above lists

* Place a star next to your areas of strength

○ Circle the areas that you need to work on

Discuss your answers



Part 2 – Developing a Plan for Difficult Feelings

In spite of our best laid plans and intentions, sooner or later we will be faced with situations in our lives which bring on negative feelings. This section is focused on what to do when those negative feelings are there and we are not able to simply ignore them.

Learning to tolerate negative feelings when we experience them

Tolerate – verb:

- accept or endure (someone or something unpleasant or disliked) with forbearance.
- be capable of continued subjection to a negative situation without adverse reaction.
- *Synonyms:* endure, deal with, bear, stand, stomach, put up with

People that are usually good at managing certain types of challenging emotions are usually better at tolerating similar emotions. Consider the following examples:

- People who improve their ability manage **anger** often develop a **frustration tolerance**- (*The ability to withstand and endure stressful or tense situations or hardships*) Simple put, people with anger management skills learn to handle problems and obstacles without losing their cool
- People who learn to manage feelings related to **anxiety** and **depression** (like fear, nervousness, apprehension, helplessness, or hopelessness) often develop an increased **stress tolerance** – (*The ability to remain calm and composed when faced with difficulties or other challenges*)

Tolerating Feelings and Emotions without “Acting Out”

What is “acting out”? Acting out in this case involves giving in to a **negative behavior** that is triggered by a challenging emotion. Managing emotions involves learning to feel our feelings without acting out in a way that might result in negative consequences or regret. Consider some examples of how it is possible to feel an emotion without acting out behaviorally:

Examples - (The feeling is underlined and the acting out behavior is bold)

- You can feel anger without **aggression** or **violence**
- You can feel fear without **avoidance** or **running away**
- You can feel craving without **giving in** or **binging**
- You can feel sadness without **isolation** or **giving up**
- You can feel disappointment or disagreement without **arguing** or **fighting**
- You can feel guilt without **self-hate** or **self-destructiveness**
- You can feel hurt without **self-harm**, **retaliation** or **revenge**
- You can feel worried without **obsessing** or **being consumed**

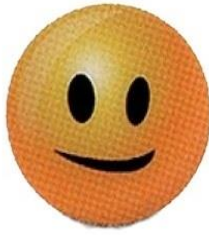


Group Activity - Self-Assessing Your Tolerance Level*: Use the following *Tolerance Scale* to assess your ability to handle difficult situations and feelings

- 0 – I can handle this pretty effortlessly and keep my cool without acting out
- 1 – I may get annoyed but I still won't act out
- 2 – It may take some effort to keep myself from acting out
- 3 – It is a struggle, so there is a chance I may lose control of my words or actions
- 4 – It is very likely I will lose control if I don't get out of this extremely difficult situation ASAP



0



1



2



3



4

***Keep in mind:** With this scale, you are not assessing how much you like or dislike a situation. You are assessing your ability to handle the situation without losing control of your emotions and doing or saying something you may regret later

Directions:

1. First, everyone should think of and write down two or three situations that can be difficult to tolerate without acting out. Some examples:
 - “Being in a conversation with someone who is very opinionated”
 - “Feeling like someone doesn't like you”
 - “A person you care about is mad at you for something that is not your fault”
 - “Finding out someone was talking behind your back”
2. Next, each person should take turns sharing their example. The rest of the group should share their personal rating for the example using the tolerance scale (1-4). *Discuss*

Closing Discussion - Dealing with Feelings: - Group Wisdom: After completing the above exercise it is probably evident that people have different strengths and abilities when it comes to tolerating difficult situations and feelings. What is difficult for one person to tolerate may be easy for another. There are dozens of ideas and techniques that we all use to cope when we are faced with tough circumstances. Most people have an idea of what works for them. Try to learn from each other what works. The counselor should throw in some ideas as well

- **With that in mind, as a group take some time to discuss some positive coping skills that you have learned from your life experiences and share your wisdom. Remember – Keep it positive**

“Experience is a master teacher, even when it's not our own.”

– Gina Greenlee



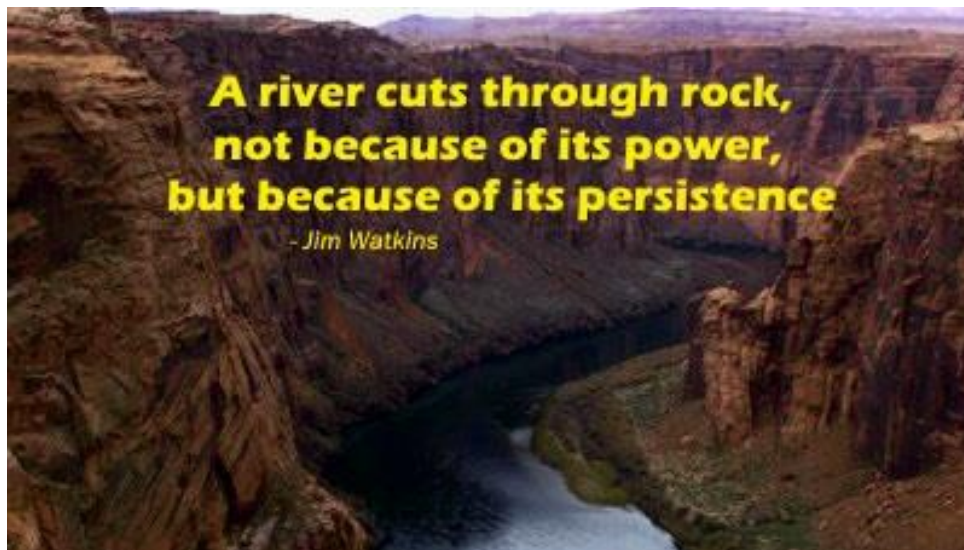
Part 3 – Cultivating Positive Feelings for the Future

Below is a list of some positive emotions. Choose one or two that you want more of in the future:

“I want more _____ in my life”:

- * Love
- * Joy
- * Peace
- * Happiness
- * Gratitude
- * Inspiration
- * Hope
- * Satisfaction
- * Other? Your own idea: _____

Start slowly and be realistic: What is your plan to increase these positive emotions in your future? What can you start to do now in the short term? – First consider the following illustration and quote



People often look for a “quick fix” when it comes to making improvements in life. Often more lasting life changes occur as a result of persistence starting with a few small changes then building upward from there. With that in mind, think about then discuss some small changes you can start with today to increase positive emotions in your life.

Examples:

- “I want more peace in my life so each day I am going to make an effort to walk away from negative conversations especially coming from negative people
- “I need more gratitude so before bed I am going to try to list and think about 3 things I am thankful for each day”

What is your short term plan for steady but persistent positive change for the future? Share & Discuss



Group Exercise – See Yourself in a Better Future

We all want to be happy and we all want to have a happy future for ourselves and our families. This exercise is simple yet effective. Start by taking a few minutes to imagine what a happy future means to you. Remember to be hopeful yet be realistic. For example imagining a future where you are happy because you won the several million dollars in the lottery may be hopeful but probably is not very realistic. Then, think about what you need in order to achieve the positive future you desire. Again remember to be hopeful but realistic.

Fill out the following based on your positive view of a happy future:

Good things I can see for myself and my family:	What do I need to get these good things:
<p>➤ EXAMPLE- "I would like financial security"</p>	<p>➤ I would need to get my driver's license back so I can get back to work for the union in the city</p>

Closing Discussion: After reviewing and discussing your chart above, discuss the following:
"You reap what you sow" (Galatians 6:7) – This simple but true wise saying tells us that what we plant (sow) today is what we harvest (reap) tomorrow. Simply put this means you will see the long term effects of you actions.

What are 2 or 3 things you can commit to working on now to build a better future in the long term?