Understanding Thoughts and Feelings:

Review and process each question below about thoughts and feelings. The answers to each question are provided but give yourself time to process each question.

1. **What are Feelings/Emotions?** - It is difficult to define what a feeling or emotion is. Some things we know about feelings:

   > A feeling is a mental experience like a thought, although it can be experienced all over our body including our in mind, our heart, or in our gut. Thoughts are usually viewed in terms of a mental process within our mind focused on processing information and formulating ideas, viewpoints and opinions.

   > A feeling is different than a thought for several reasons (see # 2)

2. **What are some of the differences between feelings and thoughts?** Interestingly the phrases “I think” and “I feel” are used interchangeably which is incorrect. They are in fact, very different.

   > People tend to have an easier time expressing thoughts more than feelings. In fact quite often when someone is asked to describe their feelings, they often answer with their thoughts:

     For example suppose someone asked you “How do you FEEL about terrorism?” - Most often people respond with answers like “I can’t stand terrorism” or “Terrorism is a huge problem in the world”. Those answers may be true about our thoughts but they do not describe how one FEELS about terrorism

   > Feelings need to be described with specific feeling words (happy, sad, hurt, scared, etc.)…

     Returning to the “How do you FEEL about terrorism?” example- To really describe your feelings, a feeling word must be present in the answer, such as: “Terrorism makes me ANGRY” or “Terrorism makes me feel WORRIED” or “I am AFRAID of terrorism”

   > Normally, when things are going the way they are supposed to, thoughts are based on some form of reason or logic. Although thoughts can unfortunately be irrational or based on faulty logic, there is usually a pattern of reasoning behind our thoughts when our mind is functioning properly. Feelings at times can also be totally separate from reason and therefore feelings can be very challenging when it comes to discovering where they originated from.

     For example -Our THOUGHTS may tell us a girlfriend/boyfriend is no good for us, but our FEELINGS at the same time can tell us otherwise (“I want to be with this person no matter what because I feel I am in love!”); even when there is evidence to the contrary such as the person is treating you poorly, for example.

   > Thoughts are much more of a conscience experience and therefore are often much more obvious. Feelings at times can be based on deep, subconscious issues and therefore may require a lot more digging to identify.

     For example - Have you ever met someone who triggered you to feel angry or annoyed even though there is no real reason for it? The reason may run deeper. The person may remind you of someone from your childhood that treated you badly, for example. Feelings can often be focused on things we are not readily aware that we are even conscious of.
3. What are some of the similarities between thoughts and feelings?

> Thoughts and feelings are related to and affect one another directly or indirectly. In other words, a thought can trigger a feeling and a feeling can trigger a thought. (More often, it is our thoughts that come first which then triggers our feelings)

For example consider how feeling sad or depressed can affect your thoughts? How might negative thoughts affect your feelings? Thoughts that could fuel sadness are often something like “What’s the point in trying any more” or “No matter what I do everything turns out bad” or “I am no good and I will never change”. By the same token, feelings of anger can fuel negative thoughts about other people like - “I can’t stand that guy, he’s looking at me the wrong way” or “Everyone better get out of my way or they will regret it!”

> Both thoughts and feelings influence our behavior and choices. Think about how many times your behavior is influenced by your thoughts or your feelings.

For example, consider how you might react to someone cutting in front of you when you were already angry as opposed to being in a good mood? How might you react differently to someone playfully teasing you if your thoughts told you that they were a friend as opposed to someone you did not trust? Your thoughts and feelings may influence your reaction (behavior) differently in both situations.

4. What can be done about thoughts and feelings?

> First, we need to identify them. Thoughts are usually easier to identify as they are usually more at the forefront of our minds and most of us are more used to sharing our thoughts. When it comes to feelings, we need to be able to talk about them in order to learn about them. It is important to learn to use feeling language instead of always speaking in thoughts. It takes practice but learning to identify, understand and discuss our feelings in addition to our thoughts is critical when it comes to learning about ourselves in order to change for the better, manage our behavior effectively and overcome bad habits.

> We need to learn to get past “secondary emotions” which are emotions that in reality have much deeper feelings behind them. For example, anger is often a secondary emotion when the deeper feeling behind the anger may in actuality be hurt or fear, both of which can be much more difficult to identify.

> It is important to learn to practice appropriately expressing not only our thoughts but our feelings with others. Feeling statements are much more powerful in communication with others than thoughts alone. Consider the following example comparison between a thought based statement and a better, feeling based statement with the same message –

- **Thought statement** – “That’s the fourth time you were late this month, I wish you would cut it out”

- **Feeling statement** - (on the same issue) “I feel frustrated when you arrive late because it disrupts me once I get started, so I was hoping that you could try to please get here earlier”

  *Which statement is more likely to get a better, more productive discussion started?*

> Identifying and sharing feelings may be difficult at first but over time and through practice, it gets easier and easier.
Practice Activity – 24 basic questions for getting us honestly thinking and talking about thoughts and feelings.

1. What feeling do you feel most of the time?
2. Which best describes you THINKER or FEELER?
3. What is one of your biggest fears?
4. What is one thing that triggers anger for you?
5. What is something (non-substance related) that makes you feel happy?
6. What feeling gives you the most trouble?
7. What is one situation in your life when you felt lost or confused?
8. When was the last time you felt depressed? How long ago was it?
9. Fill in the blank – I LOVE _________
10. Fill in the blank – I HATE _________
11. What is one thing causing you stress or anxiety in your life today?
12. What is one feeling that you can manage effectively for the most part?
13. If you are in a relationship, what feeling does your partner struggle with the most?
14. What feeling is most likely to trigger you to use?
15. What is one situation you feel guilty about?
16. What is a place or situation that helps you feel serenity or inner peace?
17. Your first impression of other people – is it more likely to be NEGATIVE or POSITIVE?
18. What is one word to describe how you feel nowadays when you are with your immediate family?
19. Which best describes your feelings: Show them or hide them?
20. Describe a life situation that made or makes you feel proud
21. Describe a situation where you felt or feel embarrassed
22. What are your thoughts about the world today and then describe how do you feel about the world today? (use appropriate feeling word)
23. What thoughts and emotions come to mind when you think about staying clean from drugs and alcohol?
24. What is one thing you like about yourself?