



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 – THOUGHTS & FEELINGS BINGO - 24 basic questions for getting us honestly thinking and talking about thoughts and feelings. DIRECTIONS -

First, everyone make a 5 x 5 grid on a blank piece of paper, as big as possible with room to write in the boxes:

		X		

Second, as shown, everyone place an X in the middle square. (Like a standard BINGO Board)

Once everyone has their grid ready, go through each question one by one. Each person should quietly answer each question by writing the answer in any one of the open boxes. (Do not share answers out loud yet) Make sure to write the number of the question so that the answer can be found later, however answers can go in any box in any order. See for example below a grid with answers for questions 1 through 3 started –

				2- Thinker
		X		
	1 - Calm			
				3 – Being eaten by a shark.

There are 24 questions so if done correctly all 24 boxes should be full after all questions have been read. When unsure of an answer, people should make their best guess so as not to leave any boxes blank



The 24 Questions:

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 (or feel) 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 how 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?



Now the Gameplay – FEELINGS BINGO

One by one, the counselor should read the following scenarios. When anyone has the answer that applies, they should place an X over the corresponding box. Like in BINGO, gameplay ends when someone has 5 X's in a row, across, up down or diagonally. Each item below applies to the question already answered of the same number (1-24)

1. (Corresponds to question #1 above) – If the feeling that you feel most of the time listed for question #1 is usually considered positive (such as “happy”, “calm”, “relaxed” energetic” etc.) then place an X in that box
2. If you stated that you are a “THINKER” place an X in your box #2
3. If the fear you listed in question #3 does not involve death, place an X in that box
4. For question 4, if you faced that anger trigger that you listed in the past 48 hours, place an X in that box
5. For question 5, if you have easy access to the thing that makes you happy (in other words, you don't have to go far or have a lot of money to have it) then place an X in that box
6. For question 6 if the feeling that gives you trouble is anything other than anger place and X in that box
7. For question 7, if that situation where you felt lost or confused happened in the past year place and X in that box
8. For question 8 If you have felt depressed within the past month, put an X in box 8
9. For question 9, if you have experienced or been around whatever you said you love in the past 24 hours, place an X in that box
10. For question 10, if your answer was a person or type of person place and X in that box
11. For question 11, if whatever is causing you stress is part of the reason why you are here right now doing this exercise, then place and X in that box
12. For question 12, count the number of letters in your answer, and if it is an odd number of letters, give yourself an X in that box
13. For question 13, if you are not currently in a relationship place and X in that box
14. For question 14, if the feeling that can trigger you to use is a negative feeling (like frustration, anger, boredom) place an X in that box
15. For question 15, if the situation that you feel guilty about somehow involves your family place an X in that box
16. For question 16, if the place where you feel serenity or inner peace is within a 30 minute car ride or less from your home, give yourself an X in that box



17. For question 17, if your first impression of others is usually negative place an X in that box
18. For question 18 if you put a positive answer to describe your feelings when you are with your family place an X in that box
19. For question 19, if you tend to hide your feelings, give yourself an X in that box
20. For question 20, if you have experienced that proud situation more than once in your life, place an X in that box
21. For question 21, if that embarrassing experience did not involve falling, give yourself an X in that box
22. For question 22, if you have a negative or pessimistic view of the world, give yourself and X in that box
23. For question 23, if your feelings about staying clean can be described as positive, hopeful or optimistic, give yourself an X in that box
24. For question 24, being honest, if that question was difficult for you to answer (Naming something you like about yourself) then give yourself an X in that box

If no one has 5 in a row by this point, the counselor can either make up some of his/her own follow up questions or else just stop here and count who has the most X's

Final Process –

Go through the original questions 1-24 and have a discussion of people's answers –

COUNSELORS – Take notice of how playing the game gets people in the mood to talk and open up. If done correctly, some really interesting and insightful discussions should arise