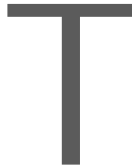


Chapter 8

*F*eelings and Sobriety:
How to Identify Your Feelings



*What is not love is fear.
Anger is one of fear's most potent faces.
And it does exactly what fear wants it to do.
It keeps us from receiving love at exactly
the moment when we need it most.*

-Marianne Williamson

So much has been negatively impacted by your use of alcohol and other drugs—not the least of which is your emotional development. As you begin to live life free from alcohol and other drugs, you will begin to feel feelings that previously had been buried by your consumption of alcohol and other drugs.

Although abstinence from alcohol and other drugs is much preferable to actively drinking and drugging, the emotional awakening that you’re experiencing can be just as painful and disconcerting. And because consuming alcohol and other drugs for so many years stunted your emotional growth, it’s likely you’ve yet to develop skills to effectively cope with your awakening emotions.

If you look back, it’s likely that you’ll discover your inability to cope with what you were feeling led you to consume alcohol and other drugs. Remaining alcohol and other drugs free *depends* on your ability to understand and cope with what you’re feeling.

For most people who are newly sober, the intensity and diversity of emotions that awaken within them can be overwhelming. Without the option of drinking and drugging away those feelings, you will be challenged to find new ways of coping with those feelings.

Some people may feel their feelings very strongly and overreact. Other people may shutdown and not feel their emotions at all. Some people will struggle just to name their emotions. To be able to effectively live sober and cope with your emotions, you must be able to identify the feelings you’re experiencing.

Because drinking and drugging has numbed you emotionally for so long, it’s likely that even naming many of your emotions may be initially difficult. Your inability

to identify your emotions may lead to further stress, which may imperil your ability to remain alcohol and other drugs free.

Below is a partial list of feelings.

Afraid	Glad	Pessimistic
Alone	Grateful	Pitiful
Angry	Grief	Proud
Annoyed	Guilty	Rageful
Anxious	Happy	Regretful
Betrayed	Hesitant	Resentful
Caring	Hopeful	Scared
Competent	Hostile	Shameful
Complete	Hurt	Strong
Confident	Impatient	Sympathetic
Delighted	Inadequate	Tender
Despairing	Irritated	Trusting
Discouraged	Isolated	Untrusting
Disgusted	Jealous	Unwanted
Distant	Joyful	Useless
Eager	Lonely	Vulnerable
Encouraged	Loving	Wanted
Envious	Mad	Warm
Fearful	Optimistic	Wary
Frightened	Overwhelmed	Weak
Fulfilled	Patient	Worthless

Pathfinder’s Exercise



- 1) Notice what you’re feeling now. Look at the list above and see if you can find a word to describe it.
- 2) Think about yesterday. What was the strongest emotion(s) you experienced yesterday? Again, con-

sult your list to see if those feelings are listed.

3) What feeling(s) do you experience most frequently? Consult the list and write it down.

In Recovery, exploring your feelings is important because you need to begin taking responsibility for what you feel. In the past, your idea of taking responsibility for your feelings may have been to blame other people.

The trap of holding other people responsible for what you're feeling is that you give your power to them.

You may find yourself wondering, what's wrong with that? Simply put, the problem with giving your power to other people is that you condemn yourself to feeling hurt, powerless, resentful, and unable to influence your life.

You'll learn in Recovery how to take responsibility for your feelings. You'll discover that you can choose how to react to other people. However to *choose* a new reaction to old familiar situations means that you will have to commit yourself to stop blaming others and embrace our old friend HOW—*Honesty, Openness, Willingness*.

How do you choose a different response to a person, place, or circumstance? It depends on your beliefs about that person, place, or circumstance. Quite simply, you have a belief system. Your belief system consists of your thoughts and attitudes that give meaning to the events in your life. Your belief system also includes your past experiences and the lessons you've learned from those past experiences. Even more than thoughts, attitudes, and lessons from the past, your belief system is made up of your interpretation of experiences, your value system and your expectations of yourself and other people.

Some of your beliefs are rational while others may be less than rational. It's even possible that some of your

beliefs are flat out wrong. All that really means is that you're capable of being mistaken from time to time. Part of being human is that from time to time you may create an illogical way of thinking, despite the fact that this pattern of thinking may seem perfectly logical to you.

Sometimes your belief that your viewpoint is accurate is unshakeable. However, your continued belief in the accuracy of certain views or beliefs often leads to self-defeating thinking and behavior.

Let me give you a clue about how you may be able to detect when you're stuck in an irrational belief. Irrational beliefs often are preceded by the words: I must always... You should never... It's wrong when you...

Why might these prefaces be the tip of the iceberg of an irrational belief? Because these prefaces often are attached to judgments, exaggerations, and/or rigidity. That's what makes your belief irrational. And when your beliefs are expressed in all or nothing thinking, you begin to judge people, places, and circumstances by standards that don't reflect reality. The danger of acting on irrational or false beliefs is that you're more vulnerable to making mistakes and creating confusion. Instead of critically evaluating your beliefs about a person, place, or circumstance, you blame another person or situation. But the last thing on your mind is that you may be wrong. Therefore, you seldom take responsibility for your actions and emotions.

Let me help you find a way to critically analyze your belief system. This is important because you want to be able to determine whether your belief about a person, place, or circumstance is rational or self-defeating. This is important because much of your emotional stress is

caused by your irrational beliefs. And, as you must know by now, the less emotional distress you experience, the less vulnerable to relapse you'll be.

First off let's break things down a little. Use the following simple formula: $A + B = C$ where

A is any Action or event that you encounter.

B is your Belief system—made up of your thoughts, values, expectations about yourself, other people, places, or situations.

C is the feeling or action that results—the Consequence of your belief about a person, place or situation.

So, you may experience an Action or event. Your Belief system will tell you something about that action or event. As a result of what you believe about the action or event, you will experience a feeling(s).

Very simply, if you alter your Beliefs about an Action, you will experience a different Consequence or feeling. Can you see why that would be? Simply, the feelings you experience are not a result of the Action but of what your Belief system tells you about the Action.

The reason why this technique is so helpful is that you have no control over the Actions you encounter on a daily basis. You have total control over the Beliefs you hold about the Actions you encounter. By changing your Beliefs, you will make changes in your emotional reaction to the Actions that you encounter in your day-to-day life. It is not too simplistic to say that you can change the way you feel by thoughtfully challenging your beliefs.

Let me show you how you might apply what we've just discussed. Let's say that when driving to work today, you found yourself being held up by the car in front of

you that was going too slow. What beliefs do you have about the person in front of you driving too slow for your personal comfort? Perhaps you believe that everybody should drive the way you want them to. Perhaps you believe that it's your God-given right to have things your way, or that you must get to work on time.

As a result of the Action—the person in front of you driving too slow, and your Beliefs—people should drive the way I want them too and I must have things my way, you experience a Consequence—an emotion called impatience or even anger.

Now in this example, you might find it more helpful to examine your irrational beliefs than to walk around all day pissed off. What were your irrational beliefs? Here's a clue. Irrational beliefs are usually preceded by words such as I must, I should, It's unfair, This is horrible what is happening to me.

So perhaps you found yourself thinking, *He should drive faster because I'm late*, or *Why does this always happen to me?* or *I must get to work on time!*

We can see, through rigid thinking, a sense of entitlement. Such irrational beliefs about how others should act are a set-up to feeling angry. And anger is a set-up to consuming alcohol and other drugs.

Once you've identified an irrational belief, the next step is to do something about it. You can challenge the irrational belief you've identified by asking yourself:

- 1) What evidence exists that demonstrates the truth of my belief?
- 2) Is my expectation reasonable or selfish?

Try this next.

- 1) It's not reasonable to expect others to try just to

make me happy.

- 2) What proof do I have that I'm so special?
- 3) Why do I think I'm entitled to get my way?
- 4) I can accept that despite my best efforts even the best laid plans don't always work out.
- 5) I can't control how other people drive.

It's that simple. Challenge your irrational beliefs and you'll experience the same Action differently. As you learn the following three steps, different experiences will lead to different, less toxic emotions.

- 1) Stop focusing on the source of your discomfort.
- 2) Identify and challenge your Beliefs about the source of your discomfort.
- 3) Continue to critically review your belief system, and you'll discover that your behaviors and emotions can change.

Now let's look at acknowledging feelings based on rational beliefs. Let's say that someone has stolen your wallet. The Action is the stealing of your wallet. Now let's say that your Belief about stealing is that stealing is wrong. As a result of the Action (stolen wallet) and the Belief (stealing is wrong), you experience the Consequence (anger, betrayal, victimization.)

What's likely to happen as a result of feeling victimized and betrayed? Perhaps you'll go off in a rage or feel sorry for yourself. As a result of going off in a rage and/or experiencing self-pity, you might be one step closer to using alcohol and other drugs. Or...

You could reach out to others for support and encouragement. Reaching out will help you avoid getting trapped in the irrational belief that people should never steal from you. In reaching out to others rather than giv-

ing into the irrational belief, you've acknowledged what you're feeling without indulging your sense of entitlement that bad things should never happen to you. In talking with others, you can:

- 1) Conclude that it was normal to feel some anger over your stolen wallet. By normalizing your feelings, you avoid inflaming them, thus worsening the situation.
- 2) Acknowledge that bad things do happen to good people.
- 3) Acknowledge that you can't control every circumstance that happens in your life.

We've covered a lot of ground about disputing irrational beliefs and acknowledging feelings that come with rational beliefs. Let's review what we've covered. Feelings are rooted in belief systems. To deal effectively with your emotions, you need to become adept at identifying, analyzing, and challenging your irrational beliefs.

You can deal best with your awakening feelings by doing the following:

- 1) Abstain from using chemicals for relief.
- 2) Don't isolate. Get involved with other people and let them get involved with you.
- 3) Express your feelings. Don't stuff them!
- 4) Listen to others. Don't assume you know everything.
- 5) Don't personalize feedback you get from others.
- 6) Do service work!
- 7) Learn how to Let Go and Let God.

Remember that:

- 1) Dealing effectively with your emotions is an

important part of Recovery. Your chemical use has limited your ability to deal with emotions and stress.

- 2) Failure to deal with your feelings can result in stress and resentments that can trigger a relapse.
- 3) No one makes you feel anything. Your Belief about an Action creates a feeling.
- 4) You give away your power by blaming others.
- 5) You can change how you react to people, places, and circumstances.