

## Chapter 8

# Are Emotions Too Awkward for You to Deal With?



### True / False

- 1. I struggle to know how I feel.
- 2. I am confused by my feelings.
- 3. I have difficulty putting my feelings into words.
- 4. I am embarrassed by how I feel.
- 5. I tell myself I shouldn't feel the way I do.
- 6. I tell myself that showing my emotions shows weakness.
- 7. I do not express my emotions to avoid disapproval or ridicule.
- 8. I try to suppress my emotions
- 9. I disengage from conversation because my emotions cause me discomfort.

- \_\_\_ 10. I don't share my feelings because I prefer to process them on my own.
- \_\_\_ 11. I deal with my emotions by thinking or doing something else.
- \_\_\_ 12. I sometimes feel overwhelmed by my emotions.
- \_\_\_ 13. I am afraid I will lose control if I don't stifle my emotions.
- \_\_\_ 14. Sometimes I become so emotional I "lose it" (i.e. control of my emotions).
- \_\_\_ 15. I engage in addictive / self-destructive behavior to escape how I feel.

\_\_\_ **Total Number Checked**

If you struggle with dealing with your emotions (as seen in the quiz above), addressing this issue is something you will need to do for the health of your marriage. This chapter is full of exercises designed to help you more become comfortable processing and verbalizing your emotions.

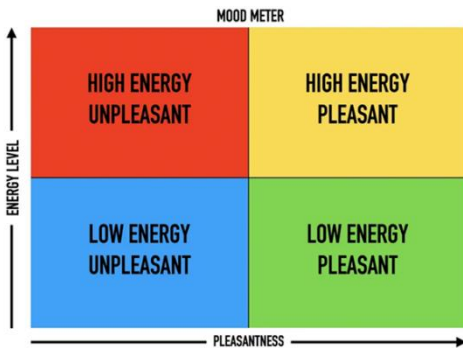
### **Identify Your Emotions More Precisely**

Native Americans from Alaska have dozens of words for snow. Because they have so much of it, knowing the precise kind they are referring to when they communicate is very important.

The same idea applies to our emotions. It is important to identify what exact emotion we feel in the moment. To aid in this endeavor, I have provided links to three useful resources.

# Mood Meter

## Overview



Hold down the Ctrl button and click the box to view a larger version of this chart.

## Detailed



Hold down the Ctrl button and click the box to view a larger version of this chart.

Note: These names on this above chart are not all-inclusive. Feel free to name an emotion that is not found on the chart if it more accurately describes what you are feeling. The Wheel of Emotions chart on the next page will help.



# Learn How to Become Emotionally Intelligent

## Why Is Emotional Intelligence in Relationships So Important?

One woman shared this story.

*I was married to a man who wasn't very emotional and early in the relationship [he] would get upset when I cried, so I learned not to. We were married for 13 years.*

*Two years ago, I divorced him because I met someone who made me feel again. The last two years have been an emotional roller coaster as I have let all those feeling finally come back out with a wonderful man by my side who embraces my "seasons" of emotions (as he calls them).*

Learning how to emotionally relate to your spouse is crucial to the well-being of every marriage. The good news is, for those who struggle in this area, it's doable.

### Case in Point

Psychiatrist, Dr. Daniel Siegel, told of a 92-year-old client named Stuart, a retired attorney.<sup>1</sup> He and his wife, who was also living, were married, at that point, for 62 years. Because of recent events, Stuart saw Dr. Siegel at the insistence of his 70-year-old son.

After talking to Stuart, Dr. Siegal quickly noticed Stuart's lack of emotional expression.

In a subsequent session, Stuart's wife, Adriene, joined him. Adriene, age 83, revealed that Stuart's parents were "the coldest people" she'd "ever met on the planet." She referred to them as "frozen." Significance? Stuart grew up in a home where emotional nurturing and warmth were severely lacking.

Given his upbringing, it is little wonder that Stuart himself remained emotionally distant from Adriene their entire married life. Adriene asked Dr. Siegal to help her husband "break out of his shell" even at this late stage in his life.

Dr. Siegal took Stuart through a therapeutic process that was transformative. Nine months after first meeting Stuart, Adriene called Dr. Siegal asking if he had given her husband "brain transplant." According to Dr. Siegal, "she was stunned at *how tuned in to her feelings he had become*, and that they were happier now than they'd ever been."

Stuart wrote in his journal. *I know it's easier to hide in books, but they just don't feel as good as love.*

Stuart needed professional help to break free from nine decades of being emotionally imprisoned. But it happened! And if it happened to him, emotional connection can happen to virtually anyone.

Becoming emotionally adept takes work, of course, whether you do it on your own or, in more severe cases, with the help of a therapist.

The exercises on the next page are for those of you who want to become more emotionally expressive and so on your own.

## Before You Start the Exercises



### Discuss

Review your answers to the quiz above. Share, to the best of your ability, why you think you struggle so much with your emotions (assuming you do). The goal of this dialogue is to assist your spouse in gaining a better understanding of your thoughts without focusing on making any changes.



## Six Exercises to Increase Emotional Connection

### Exercise 1:

#### How Are You Feeling? (Overview chart)

When your spouse asks you, “How are you feeling?” instead of saying, “Fine,” consider a different approach. Based on the Overview

chart (above), the next time your spouse asks you, “how you are doing?” respond in one of the four following ways:

- My energy level is up, and I am in a pleasant mood.
- My energy level is down, and I am in a pleasant mood.
- My energy level is down, and I am in an unpleasant mood.
- My energy level is up, and I am in an unpleasant mood.

Use this framework with each other multiple times a day. It provides a good start for connecting emotionally. Elementary schools teach this approach to students, so it should not be too hard for you.

## Exercise 2

### **Guess the Feeling** (Overview chart)

- Watch a television program or movie together at home. When you see an emotion displayed, pause the TV and describe what emotion you see using the **Overview** chart. Does your spouse agree with you? If not, discuss what you see differently. Do this exercise enough times until you agree on most occasions. Then move on to b. below.
- Do this exercise with each other. Try to determine what your spouse is feeling without being told. The goal is to read each



other's emotions correctly more times than not. After you complete this task, move on to the exercise 3 below.

### Exercise 3

#### **How Are You Feeling? (Detailed Chart)**

- c. When your spouse asks you, "How are you feeling?" use the Detailed Mood Meter chart (above) to answer. Be as specific as you can to identify your precise emotion. Use this framework with each other multiple times a day.

### Exercise 4

#### **Guess the Feelings (Detailed)**

- d. Watch a television program or movie together. When you see an emotion displayed, pause the TV and describe what emotion you see using the Detailed Mood Meter Chart. Does your spouse agree with you? If not, discuss what you see differently. Do this exercise enough times until you agree on most occasions.
- e. Then see if you can do this with each other. Try to correctly determine the other's mood by using the Detailed chart on a daily basis.

### Exercise 5

#### **Ask Your Spouse Why S/he Feels This Way**

- f. After your spouse shares how s/he is feeling, ask your mate why s/he is feeling this way. Do not argue with your spouse. Your goal is

to learn the thoughts behind the emotion, not debate them.

- g. Discuss whether you think the thought upon which the emotion is based is true or a misinterpretation. (See chapter 7 for the previous discussion).



## Think About Your Body

### Exercise 6

#### **What Bodily Sensations Do You Experience When Arguing with Your Mate?**

Check All that Apply

- I get a headache.
- I feel dizzy or light-headed.
- I can't think clearly.
- Tears well up in my eyes, I cry.
- My face becomes red, flushed.
- My face is drained of color.
- I grit my teeth, jaw becomes clenched.
- My mouth becomes dry.
- I begin to breathe rapidly.
- I get a lump in my throat.
- I can hardly talk, I become speechless.
- I can't breathe.
- My shoulders get tense.
- My chest gets tight.
- My heart races or pounds.
- I feel my blood pressure rising.

- I feel like jumping out of my skin.
- I grit my teeth.
- I clench my fists.
- I get loud, yell, or scream.
- I lose focus, become disoriented.
- I become nauseous.
- I get a sinking feeling.
- My stomach is tied up in knots.
- My hands shake.
- My palms become cold or clammy.
- My legs are jumpy
- My legs feel rubbery.
- Muscles tighten up.
- I begin to sweat, perspire.
- I tremble, become jittery, shaky.
- I feel frozen.
- I feel numb.
- other:

Our emotions exist both in our brains and our bodies. Psychologist William James accurately said over a century ago, *“Emotion dissociated from all bodily feeling is inconceivable.”*

If you are unsure what you are feeling, simply ask yourself, “What’s going on inside my body?” Use the list above to help you locate the sensation within you.

Then ask, “What is this sensation telling me? If this sensation (e.g., pit in the stomach) could

speak, what would it say? What emotion is this sensation in my stomach connected to?”



To visually illustrate the link between our emotions and their impact on our bodies, view this [chart](#).

## Postscript

A year after their last session together, Stuart, then almost 94, wrote Dr. Siegal, *I cannot tell you how much fun I am having. Life has new meaning now. Thank you.*

## Endnote

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Daniel J. Siegal, M.D., “Mindsight: The New Science of Personal Transformation,” chapter 6.

[Return to Table to Contents](#)