

Feelings: Why we have them and what to do with them

Human beings have lots of different feelings. Sometimes we like our feelings and sometimes we don't, but it's always important to pay attention to them. They let us know how important things are, what to watch out for, and what makes us happy. The stronger they are, the faster we learn! Sometimes we don't like the way feelings feel, especially if they don't go away. Some people say to ignore them and pretend we don't have feelings or tell us not to let others know how we feel. They don't know that, if we just feel our feelings, they'll disappear and we'll remember whatever we needed to learn. We'll know: what to watch out for, what to do if difficult things happen in the future, what really makes us happy and how to make good things happen again.

We need to make sure your feelings are working the way they're supposed to work. Nobody needs to teach a baby to feel scared or mad or happy. Our feelings are ready to work the minute we're born, but they can get stuck when bad things have happened or if we think it's not okay to just feel them. Luckily, there's a quick and easy way to help them get back to where they started.

Feelings come from the middle part of our brains, so, first, let's talk about what we know about how our brains work.

1. **A place for memories.** We can't learn about something if we're thinking about a whole bunch of things at the same time. We need to put away everything else and concentrate on what we're doing, right? Well, our brains are very good at putting things away when we're not working on them, unless there's something we really need to pay attention to. To do this, we actually have two brains. Our **right brain** holds all the information we've taken in about the world and ourselves until we can sort through it and decide what to keep and what we don't need. When something harmful happens, it holds onto everything we saw, heard, tasted, touched, smelled, thought, and felt until we can look back at it and figure out what was dangerous and what wasn't. It works just like our body does when we eat and it decides that we need to keep us healthy and sends what we don't need out the other end. Scientists call it "pruning" (like they do to trees) but we don't really know where the information branches go when they're "pruned." What we do know is that what **is** important to keep gets filed away in our **left brain** (left prefrontal cortex) where it's ready whenever we need it. *Sometimes we need to help our brain put memories away until we can give them our full attention. Some ways are to do that are:*

Remind ourselves that they can stay in our **right brain**, or

Make an **imaginary place (container)** for them, or

Send them to be here in my office.

Where are you going to keep whatever memories you still need to sort through until you can re-view them, or we can do it together?

2. **Help your amygdala keep you safe and ready.** We have another part of our brain that checks out everything we see, hear, taste, touch, smell, and everything that's happening, even inside our bodies. Scientists named it the amygdala. Its job is to make our body do whatever we need to do, as fast as we need to do it, sometimes in half a millisecond. It's doing its job 24/7 – day and night, every day of every year! Even when we're asleep, it's checking out everything that's happening, so it can wake us up if we need to, or let us know when we need to turn over, pull the covers up or anything else. It's especially good at watching out for danger!

Sometimes our amygdala shuts off or works too hard, making us feel like we need to hide or get away or fight back when we don't need to. Then we can't feel safe when we are safe. If that happens, we need to **let** whatever is making us feel like something bad is happening when it isn't go back into our **Place for Memories (container)** and remind our amygdala, "**It's okay to feel safe when we are safe.**" Later we'll find out what's making you feel upset and together we'll figure out what you need to **be safe.**

Your therapist will help you help your amygdala by tuning in the "**Feel Safe when I am Safe**" channel inside you. Then we'll help your brain make connections like it does when you're dreaming by paying attention to something going back and forth until you feel safe, knowing your amygdala will always make your body do what it needs to do as fast as it needs to be done. Next, we'll see what you can say to yourself to bring back that **Safe and Ready feeling.**

3. Recalibrating stuck feelings. Pictures in our minds seem to make our brains work really fast. Did you know that when we're dreaming at night, our minds are sorting through what we've learned during the day and deciding what to keep, then connecting it up with other stuff we've already learned? We even have a part in our brain that's like the person in an office who puts files away and gets them when you need them. It's called the **hippocampus** and it hardly ever makes mistakes. Sometimes being able to make pictures in our minds is fun, but other times there are upsetting pictures that get stuck and we see them over and over. When that happens, our mind is telling us we need to pay attention to something important. Your therapist's job is to help you *learn* from the pictures you *don't* want to keep seeing in your mind or dreams, so they'll go away and you'll see pictures you *do* want to see.

We're going to use your mind's ability to make pictures to be sure your feelings aren't stuck ON or OFF. They just need to be ready when we need them. This is how we'll do it. After we 1) **put away** all the upsetting memories and problems you still need to learn from, and 2) **help your amygdala** so your body is feeling calm, we'll 3) see what picture comes to mind for each of your most important feelings. You'll watch or think of the picture in your mind while you're paying attention to something going back and forth. When the picture stops changing, the feeling is ready to work like it's supposed to. It won't be too strong or not strong enough any more, just ready for you to feel it whenever it *is* needed. There's a list of our most important feelings (at the end) and what they do for us, either protect us or make life fun and better.

GO! After we make sure all your protective and wonderful feelings are working the way they're supposed to work and you're feeling safe when you are safe, we'll start taking the memories and problems out of your container a piece at a time so you can sort through them and remember what you need to remember. You won't need to worry about feelings being too weak or too strong, so it will be easier and faster. Your therapist will add something going back and forth to help your eyes move back and forth like they do when you dream, so you can learn what you need to learn as fast as you can.

If we learned something was dangerous a long time ago and we haven't had a chance to go back to it to see if we could handle it more easily now, our brain and body will keep doing things the same old way. It will have become a habit, which is a good thing, *unless* you don't need it anymore. Just like you get better at something the more you practice it, the longer it's been since we learned something was dangerous, the stronger the brain and body connections will be. So we'll need to let your mind and body remember where you first learned what you learned (in the **past**), what you automatically do **now** (the **present**) to see if there might be a better way, and imagine what might happen in the **future**, so you know you'll be ready to protect yourself or somebody else if you need to.

Our brains just want us to: Learn from the **past**. Know what to do **now**. Be ready for the **future**.

If we haven't taken time to look back at dangerous things that happened or we know about, painful feelings will remind us we haven't learned all we need to learn. If you cut yourself and it looks like it's healed, but hurts when you press on it, it's not healed. Right? We'll be doing something like that. When we tune in memories, it's like pressing on a cut. If painful feelings come back, it means we haven't learned everything we needed to learn from what happened. If a cut is really painful, you know it's important to pay attention to it and take care of it so it *will* heal. We have really strong, painful feelings about memories because there's something really important we need to learn. Amazingly though, as soon as we let the feelings be as strong as they need to be, they disappear. We've learned what we needed to learn.

FEELINGS JUST TURN INTO FACTS!

Once that happens, our hippocampus just files the facts away until we need to know whatever we need to know, like what to watch out for, so we can stay away from danger. WE won't have to think about those things any more. Kids and grown-ups aren't supposed to keep feeling upset. Kids are supposed to be playing and helping and loving and learning new things!

Your therapist's job is to help you get rid of any feelings that are stuck inside and are making you feel like you need to do things you don't really need to do now. Together we'll find out where they came from and use something moving back and forth to help your right and left brains work together with so you can learn what you need to learn as fast as possible and feel better and better! It's called EMDR. A therapist named Francine Shapiro discovered it. Now therapists all over the world are helping kids and grown-ups feel better and learn faster.

First Aid for Feelings and When to Ask for Help

Remember,

Feelings only stay if we push them away,

so, it works best if we can feel what we need to feel right away.

That doesn't mean we have to do anything with our feelings (unless something needs to be done), we just need to feel them. Sometimes though, it just doesn't work to let that happen right away. That's when we need to know:

First Aid for Feelings

Feelings only work when we're paying attention to them and letting them do what they're made to do. They help us learn what to watch out for and what we want more of. If we need to get away from danger, we'll automatically wait 'til later to learn everything we need to learn about what happened. If we haven't taken time to do that, something will remind us of the danger and we'll suddenly have feelings that are stronger than we need. That's usually not a good time to think about what our feelings are calling our attention to, so we need to be able to put them away quickly, knowing we'll come back to them later.

When you CAN'T pay complete attention to your feelings, they need to be kept in your right brain until you can. Here's an easy way to help when it doesn't happen auto's kind of like pressing on a cut to stop it from bleeding when it doesn't stop by itself.

1. Feel a feeling that you can't work on right now.
2. Send whatever it's about to your right brain or your place for memories (container).
(Don't try to figure out what it is you're sending.)
3. Let your amygdala know that it's okay to feel safe and ready by saying, *"It's okay to feel safe when I am safe."*

STOP paying attention to the problem for now!

Remember,

We can keep stuck feelings put away for a while, but, if there's something important for us to learn, they won't stay put away.

Taking your Feeling Temperature

Taking your feeling temperature is easier than taking your body temperature. If you start paying attention to how you feel, you'll see that sometimes you have no feelings (that's a 0), and sometimes pretty strong feelings (that's between 5 and 7). Feelings can go up to 10. That's when they're as strong as they can be. WE can't do anything but feel them because, whatever they're about is really, really important. Feelings that help us stay safe use up energy. Feelings that make life better, give us energy.

0

10

What's **your** feeling temperature right now?

Here are some good ways to help you when you **CAN** pay attention and learn what you need to learn.

FOR FEELINGS THAT AREN'T TOO STRONG

(below 5)

Feel the feelings inside
Write about it
Go for a walk or run
Draw pictures
Listen to music

Talk about it

Let the feelings come out
Make a joke about it
Watch a movie or DVD
Do something symbolic
Make music

Let your **IMAGINATION** work.

Sometimes it works at the same time something is happening. Other times, it works later when you're thinking about what is troubling you. If the feelings don't go away right then, imagining isn't the best choice especially if they're mad feelings that keep coming back.

Let your **DREAMS** work.

Dreams are especially good at helping us learn from scared, mad and sad feelings. If you wake up and feel better, they're working. If you wake up feeling upset, or have the same kind of dram over and over again, they're not working and you'll need help from someone.

FRIST AID FOR STRONG FEELINGS

(above 5)

There are a whole bunch of ways you can speed up learning from feelings.

1. Pay attention to what you're feeling.
2. Help your mind and body work faster by:
 - tapping on your body's energy channels (like acupuncture) www.emofree.com or
 - connecting up energy channels (like praying or Brain Gym) or
 - connecting your right and left brains by:
 - o tapping one side of your body and then the other or
 - o looking back and forth (like during dreaming) or
 - o listening to sounds going back and forth
3. Let your mind/body do what it knows how to do.
It won't work if you *try* to make something happen.
It won't work if you really *do* what you feel like doing
It only works if you do it in your imagination!

STOP when it stops changing and the stuck feelings are gone.

or

STOP if the feelings aren't going away. You need help.

People who can help me with stuck feelings are _____.

Our E→Motions

Emotion is a good name for feelings because they let us know what's important and push us into motion to do something about it (stop harmful things from happening and make helpful things happen even more), if we can. We have lots of different feelings and they have lots of names. There are two kinds of feelings: ones that **protect** us from something and ones that **connect** us to something.

Our most important feelings are:

(Protect Us)

Sorry or Ashamed

Sorry for yourself

Disgusted

Scared

Mad

Sad

(Connect Us)

Proud

Thankful

Happy

Curious

Loving

Connected

Trauma results from experiences we're not prepared to handle at the time they occur.

This explains why one person may be traumatized and another not when experiencing the same threat. Disturbing childhood experiences are often most traumatic because we're dependent of parents and caretakers and are very vulnerable ourselves. Babies and children can't survive alone, so we usually couldn't run away or fight back if someone didn't protect or care for us. We need to go back and review those experiences in order for our bodies and minds to know when we have the power to get away or fight back now, if we need to. As we process through threatening experiences, we go from *feeling to fact*. "I'm scared" becomes "it's dangerous," "I feel sad" changes to "it is sad." When we can remember the experience without any distress, we've learned all we need to learn from it, so we won't need to over react or underreact to similar experiences. If it's been a long time since the event, our reactions will have become habit, so we'll use EMDR to clear up present and possible future difficulties as well.

People frequently ask if the feelings will come back. They won't, unless we didn't finish reprocessing (re-learning from) the experience. It's like baking a cake. You can't get the batter back, even if it's only partially baked. Because of this, we will go back to it as many times as necessary to make sure it's completely processed.

Why We All Need a “Container” and How to Use It!

Whenever something distressing happens (an experience we're not prepared to handle), our mind needs to review everything seen, heard, tasted, touched, smelled, experienced in any way, to identify what is dangerous so we can determine what we need to do to protect ourselves or others. That's what's happening when we go over and over something in our minds. If we can't focus on it right away, the right hemisphere of our brain is made to hold all that sensory information until we can review it. When we do review it, we need to give it our full attention, or we won't be able to learn what we need to learn from the experience. Our right hemisphere will hold whatever we need to review until we can thoroughly sort through the experience and determine what's important to remember. When we're little, it does it automatically. If there are too many unresolved disturbing life experiences in a person's system or the situation is perceived as life threatening, the right hemisphere becomes less and less willing to just stuff those experiences away. What usually happens then is that we keep feeling upset, but we aren't giving the issue our full attention, so we can't sort through (learn from) it. That's when it helps to intentionally set aside distressing experiences or concerns until we *can* give them our full attention and learn what we need to learn. Our built-in imagination can help us do that quickly by having a specific place or Container.

Where can you store concerns, worries, problems, upsetting emotions, pain that still need to be reviewed?

Basic truths about reprocessing (learning from our experiences):

- It requires our full attention. The brain doesn't change unless we're focused.
- We can only reprocess the amount our system can handle at one time.
- We need to feel/be safe in order to review or reprocess experiences.
- We may not be able to reprocess very early trauma (before age 3) by ourselves.
- We may not be able to reprocess life-threatening events by ourselves.
- We learn important information immediately, but need to fully review it to learn *all* we need.

Container Dos and Don'ts

- Do practice using it when your distress is low.
- Don't wait until there's a very upsetting issue. You won't think of using it if it's not a habit.
- Do use it for vague uncomfortable feelings and when you don't know why you're upset.
- Don't try to figure out what it is if you need to put it away (that's reprocessing/learning).
- Do schedule a Re-View Time each day to focus on what you can process on your own.

How to use the container:

Whenever you can't give concerns or feelings (physical or emotional) your full attention...or it doesn't feel safe...or you don't have time right the...say to yourself:

"Whatever still needs to be sorted through (reviewed), can go into my (name of your container) for now."

Now you can go back to focusing on whatever needs your attention at the time.

What do emotions do? Why do we have them?

Our emotions protect us and enhance our lives. They're part of us from the very beginning. If you watch a newborn baby, you'll see that nobody has to teach them to feel fear, or anger, or delight, or contentment. Most of us have been told to ignore our feelings at times though, and may have even learned that it's not okay to feel some feelings.

The truth is: emotions call our attention to what is important and accelerate learning.

As soon as our feelings are felt, or released in our imaginations, we'll automatically learn from our experiences and remember what's important. The stronger they are, the faster we learn. We won't need the feelings to call our attention to the memory or problem, so we'll return to feeling relaxed and mindfully aware, more capable of dealing with future difficulties.

Remember, trauma results from experiences we're not prepared to handle.

That's why we want to make sure our emotions are working the way they were intended to work so we can learn from every experience as quickly as possible.

Are the Basic Emotions on a Continuum?*

	AVOID	0	APPROACH		
	-10	Life Preserving, Protective	0	Life Enhancing, Connective	+10
Shame (I caused harm).....		0		(I caused help)	Pride
Compassion (I was/they were harmed)		0		(I was/they were helped)	Gratitude
Fear (stay away, it's dangerous)		0		(go toward, it's beneficial)	Curiosity/Seeking
Disgust (spit out/reject, you're/it's toxic)		0		(take in)	Joy/Play
Anger (you/it causes harm)		0		(you are beneficial)	Love
Sadness/Grief (lose/disconnect)		0		(connect)	Loveable/Care

Maybe other internal circuitry can be recalibrated too?

Hunger Pain Touch

Safety systems (Parasympathetic, Sympathetic, Social Engagement)

Note:** These are Katie O'Shea's ideas/observations at this point in time (plus what she's learned from other's theories and research). Only Jaak Panksepp's circuits have been biologically researched. See: ***The Archeology of Mind by Panksepp and Biven (2012).

Guilt/Shame: Feeling sorry for doing something that's not okay is one of our best feelings! If we find out we did something that hurt someone or something (or even ourselves), and we feel sorry about it, we won't do it again. We won't need consequences or punishment because we just won't do *that* again. We will do whatever we can to fix it, if we can. That's how we learn from our mistakes. But, if we try not to feel bad, like blame somebody else for what we did, the bad feelings will pile up inside and we'll start thinking, "I'm bad" instead of "What I did was bad," then we'll have to either try to be very, very good to prove we aren't bad, or give up and just be bad, or do things to distract us like watch TV, or even hurt ourselves, or use addictions to keep the bad feelings away.

☹️10	7	5	3	0	3	5	7	10😊
shame	remorse	guilt	regret		satisfied	pleased	proud	arrogant
Feelings that Protect Us					Feelings that Connect Us			

Proud: When we do something that takes a lot of work and it turns out well, we need to feel proud of ourselves! We don't want to skip that feeling because it will make us work harder and use our talents to make ourselves, and our world, better. Of course, we don't want to just sit around and say how wonderful we are, but we don't need to worry about that happening. When we feel our feelings, they go away. Proud feelings fill us with energy. It's like the gas in the car gets used up while we're driving and we need to fill up again so we can go even farther! If we feel pride, we'll take care of what's important and keep making it even better, if that's possible. If it's the best it can be, we'll find other things to make better.

Sorry for Yourself: When something bad happens to us and we didn't do anything to make it happen, we *need* to feel sorry for ourselves. As soon as we let ourselves feel how much it hurt us, we'll get busy doing whatever we can to make things better. Even if people tell you, "Don't feel sorry for yourself," it really *is* okay. If we don't, the feelings won't go away and we won't learn what we can do to protect ourselves and others from harm. They'll just keep trying to let us know something hurt us and wasn't fair. *Remember, feelings only stay if we push them away.*

☹️10	7	5	3	0	3	5	7	10😊
crushed	pity	sorry for	hurt	unfair	appreciative	thankful	grateful	beholden
Feelings that Protect Us					Feelings that Connect Us			

Gratitude: When something good happens that we didn't make happen, we feel appreciation. Other people might say something nice about one of our talents, or our looks that we're lucky to have, or give us a gift. We feel it when we get to see something beautiful, like a sunset, or get to go somewhere on a vacation, or get to do something we like to do, or eat something we like, because somebody else made that happen for us. We feel it when we see others who don't get to have or aren't as fortunate as we are.

Disgust: When something is icky and yucky, we just want to spit it out and get away from it, like our body does if we eat something that's rotten or poisonous. We say "That's sick" or "S/He's sick." We feel like this when someone does something that's *not okay*, that seems rotten and not anything we want to be around. This is a feeling we don't want to ignore. If we don't pay attention to it and keep hanging around someone or something that's disgusting, we'll become more like they are and people will start feeling icky around us.

☹️10	7	5	3	0	3	5	7	10😊
sick	disgust	disdain	yucky		pleased	happy		joy
Feelings that Protect Us					Feelings that Connect Us			

Joy: If we feel happy, we know we're doing something that we want to do again. Instead of spitting it out, we want to take it in and feel how good it feels, like eating good food or hearing wonderful sounds and being around wonderful people! If we like what we see, smell, feel, or do, we'll remember it and want to do things like it again and again. Having fun with other people makes it feel even better. Happy feelings really give us energy and they're even more enjoyable when shared with others.

Fear: Scared feelings let us know that something might hurt us or someone else. If we pay attention to the fear, we'll figure out what we need to do: freeze in place, get away as fast as we can, fight, or find someone who can protect us. If something could happen that we don't quite know how to handle, we'll worry about it and that will make us find out what we need to know. If something's really, really scary, part of our brain might keep us from being able to talk. When dangerous things happen, especially when we're little and we can't let the feelings get as strong as they need to be, we start to feel afraid of a lot more things. When that happens, it gets harder and harder to figure out what's really dangerous and what's not. If we think about what happened and let the scared feelings come back through, we won't need them any more. Our mind will figure out what we need to watch out for, if we can take care of ourselves, or if we need help, and our body will go back to feeling calm, unless something is happening.

☹️10	7	5	3	0	3	5	7	10😊
terrified	fear/scared	worry	concern		interest	anticipation		excitement

Feelings that Protect Us

Feelings that Connect Us

Curiosity: When our bodies and minds are working the way they were made to, we love to learn! It feels good to figure things out. When we feel fear, we need to get away, but curious feelings push us toward things that are different. The fact is we need to try new things and find new ways to get better at what we're already doing. Our brains only make new cells if we have new experiences: that can be thinking, feeling, seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting, or doing something. Learning doesn't just happen in school. If we do new things in new ways, we'll challenge ourselves to be all we can be and we will help make our world better and better!

Anger: Mad feelings tell us somebody or something is doing something hurtful. The feelings protect us from letting people or things be hurt and give us the energy we need to fight back with words or our muscles, if we have to. If we feel mad and it would only cause more hurt to let the feelings out, our imaginations show us what we feel like doing and let the energy out that way. After we've felt the mad feelings, even if we haven't done or said anything, we won't stay angry. We'll just do what we can to make things better. If we can't do anything about the problem, we won't waste any more time or energy on it. We need to be careful with our mad feelings, because if they're over a 5, the people we're mad at will think we hate *them* instead of being upset about what they did. That's when our imaginations can help the most. If we don't get mad at the people who hurt us, the feelings will just come out every time somebody else does something we don't like, and then they'll boomerang back and get stuck in us again. So when we're having lots of mad feelings above a 5, we might need help finding out where they came from and letting the feelings out so nobody else gets hurt.

☹️10	7	5	3	0	3	5	7	10😊
hateful	mad	ticked	bugged	care about		like	love	in love

Feelings that Protect Us

Feelings that Connect Us

Love: Loving feelings make us want to be near other people, animals, and nature. We want to be around whomever or whatever it is because we feel good when we are. Everything needs love. Even plants grow better when they're loved. Babies' brains grow more neurons (brain cells) when they're given lots of love and the people doing the loving grow more neurons too! Remember, we can keep growing more brain cells all our lives, so loving not only feels good, but it makes us smarter too! It's not good to hold in love energy, just like it's not good to hold in scared or mad feelings. Loving touch calms us. Think of how good it feels to pet a dog or cat. When we're "in love" we can't think of anything else but being with the one we love. Just like the feelings that protect us, when we have really strong good feelings, we can't think of anything else. That's okay if it's a new baby or someone we might want to be with all of our life, but other times, we need to be able to have a whole bunch of things on our minds.

Sadness/Grief/Panic: Sad feelings let us know we've lost someone or something important to us. The more important they were, the stronger the sadness is. Our bodies learned they were part of our lives, so it has to unlearn that, and it hurts to break the automatic connections between our bodies and our brains. Tears carry the hurt away: then we remember the good times we had together. If we let ourselves feel the sadness each time we lose someone or something, we'll learn what happens in life, and then we won't hold back our love. We'll make sure we really love, enjoy, and appreciate our friends and family and pets while we have them, knowing that someday they might not be with us. Sad feelings also let us know we need lots of things to be the same. That helps us know what will happen, so we'll be able to do things automatically without having to think about it. Besides, when we have lots of changes, our brains and bodies need to keep making and breaking connections and that takes way too much energy! If there are too many changes or we don't think we can handle what is happening, we can even feel hopeless.

☹️10 7 5 3 0 3 5 7 10😊
 grief hopeless helpless sad disappointed concern for helpful care about connected

Feelings that Protect Us

Feelings that Connect Us

Care/Connection: We know we need to take care of each other even when we're babies. If one baby cries, others will too, until someone comes to help. We feel good when we can do something to help each other and it feels good to be helped when we need it. Loving touch helps our bodies heal and even makes us learn faster whether we're the one touching or being touched! Skin is our biggest sense organ, so maybe feeling loving touch is at least as important as being able to see beautiful sights or smell wonderful smells or taste something really yummy! Oxytocin is secreted when we feel love and touch or are touched in a caring way. This strengthens a sense of connection, reduces pain, increases immune functioning and improves learning ability.

Humans are Learning Machines!

We learn from EXPERIENCE:

Our own

Others

By watching via our “mirror neurons”:

- automatically up to age 3
- semi-automatically from 3 to 6 years
- when we’re paying attention throughout life

Hearing stories about them and their experiences.

(These are in order of how we learn best. Being told something is the least effective.)

Emotion accelerates learning:

If an experience feels **pleasurable** (fun, interesting, exciting, loving) **we remember!**

If it feels **distressing** (shameful, scary, hurtful, frustrating, sad) we **don’t forget!**

(Boring repetition works eventually, but it takes the longest.)

If we feel like we’re in danger, we can’t learn:

- no blood is going to our cortex (the learning part of our brain).
 - All our blood is going to our legs to get away and our arms to fight back.
- (Our bodies are continually scanning for danger. See Stephen Porges’ work.)

We need to be learning throughout our lives:

Our **SEEKING circuit** is “the mother of all brain circuits” (Jaak Panksepp, PhD.)

Novelty gets our attention.

If we’re not learning (i.e. growing), the brain is dying.

“Use it or lose it.” (Michael Merzenich finally convinced scientists of neuroplasticity.)

Norman Doidge tells the story in *The Brain That Changes Itself*.

Bodies learn too! And react one million times faster than the conscious mind!

(See Bruce Lipton, PhD’s work at www.brucelipton.com)

Learning and Unlearning

Our brains and bodies are continually learning and unlearning. There are memory circuits in the brain (that connect like electrical circuits) so our bodies can do what we need to do automatically. This works really well, if the memories have been reviewed and everything is up to date. If they haven’t been, we may react as if something is more dangerous than it currently is, or feel like we can’t handle something we can find a way to manage now.

The only way our brain can change itself is to focus on the problem, so:

1. Thank your body for reminding you there might be danger.
2. Remind yourself you can figure things out now and get help when you need it.
3. Focus on what concerns you.
4. Let yourself feel the feelings about it so they can be released and your brain can bring together what you *do know*.
5. See if there’s anything you *don’t know* about handling the concern.
6. Get help with whatever you don’t know.

If the feelings were more intense than they needed to be, set aside time to review where your brain learned you couldn’t handle what’s happening now. EMDR’s bilateral stimulation (back-and-forth eye movements, Butterfly Hugs, and/or alternating taps, vibrations, tones) and acupuncture methods like Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT – www.emofree.com) are very helpful to speed up the process and ensure both the brain and body are updated. David Bercelli’s **Trauma Release Exercises** are also beneficial. *Talking about a problem won’t change the body’s automatic reaction.* If you learned there was danger at a time when you were very young or the situation was life threatening, it’s likely you’ll need the help of a specialist. Until you can review where you learned there was danger and update your system, you’ll need to **repeatedly** remind yourself: *“I’m okay now. I’ll handle what I can and get help if I need it.”*

With practice, your system will settle down and stop continually reminding you there are memory circuits that still need to be updated. It's trying to protect you and keep year-old safe.

It will take time and repetition for you to build a new circuit that says, "I'm not in danger now." Whenever there is danger, the brain prioritizes that circuit, so we need to either update it, or build a new circuit that says, "I was helpless to handle things, but I'm okay now." The body is only concerned about danger in the present moment, so with repeated reassurance, it will eventually settle down.

As soon as you can, review where your brain/body learned there was danger (with help from a specialist if needed), so the memory circuit won't keep getting stuck at a time when you really were helpless.

First Aid for Fear

When the body reacts with fear (people call it anxiety, panic, phobia, but they're all activation of our FEAR circuit) that's stronger than you need to call attention to danger, what seems to work best, is the imagination. In fact, whenever an emotional response is greater than it needs to be at the time, our imagination provides the fastest, most complete way to release it. If it keeps recurring, there are past experiences that need to be reviewed so that your body doesn't keep thinking a current situation is ore dangerous than it actually is, or one you're not capable of handling, when you are. Here's what to do:

Imagine what you feel like doing (especially if it seems excessive).

When your body reacts with fear/flight energy, you are sensing danger. Blood is going to your legs to get away. Brain scans show there is little or no blood going to our prefrontal cortex where thinking happens and knowledge is stored. **If you don't actually need, or want to get away, you can allow that energy to dissipate by imagining what you feel like doing, e.g. running, screaming from wherever you are. Then your body knows you could get away if needed and will be able to focus back on whatever you need to do regarding what danger is present, if any.**

Bodies only react with more fear energy than necessary when they've learned from past experiences that they needed it or were unable to use it to get away at that time. So we usually need to review where it was learned in order for the body to be able to settle down. If it's going on for a long time, the reaction will have become a habit, so current situations may also need to be reviewed together, plus potential future ones.

First Aid for Anger

Anger calls attention to harm and is one of our biological emotional circuits, but it's rare that we need to use anger energy to physically fight back. Low levels of anger (annoyance, irritation, frustration) can be expressed to let others know their behavior is harmful. When your anger is intense though, they can't focus on their behavior and feel rejected. It says, "You're bad." To release anger energy that's greater than needed:

Imagine what you feel like doing (even if it's violent).

Don't stop until you feel compassion for the person you're angry at.

Some people call this "forgiveness." Katie O'Shea calls it "**compassion with protection**" because your body will feel powerful enough to avoid continuing to place yourself in harm's way. You'll take whatever preventive actions you can without hurting anyone. The anger energy will have been released from your arms and be available in your brain for creative problem solving.

Just like fear energy, bodies don't react with more anger than necessary for no reason. If you continue to feel anger, you'll need to review where it was learned (**past**), release any emotion not safe to be released at that time, and clear similar **present**, as well as potential **future** situations. If anger isn't directed at the actual (or original) cause of the harm, it can't be released and will just boomerang back.

Remember: Dreams are our automatic, nighttime method of releasing distress and learning from our experiences. They're doing their job as long as you don't awaken in the midst of distress and don't repeatedly have the same or similar dreams. If you do, you need assistance.

First Aid for Physical Feelings

Physical pain or discomfort can be caused by emotional energy that was trapped in your body when you weren't able to do something that needed to be done, couldn't get away or fight back, or possibly even show upset feeling of any kind. Bodies can also overreact to something that doesn't cause other people distress (most people refer to this as an "allergy").

What we're continually doing is mapping and remapping our brain circuits. Strong feelings (emotional or physical) create strong circuits, so we won't forget what's important and our body will react one million times faster than it would if we had to think about it.

When there doesn't seem to be a reason for feeling physical distress (no injury or illness) and:

- **it's not a good time to help your mind modify that circuit:**

1. **Thank your body for reminding you there's something it's struggling with.**
2. **Ask your mind to set it aside/block the circuit until you can give it your full attention,**
 - during therapy sessions, or
 - if it feels safe, on your own during your Re-View Time

or

- **it is a good time to help your mind update that circuit:**

1. **Focus on or imagine (if you can't see it) what that part of your body looks like now.**
2. **Imagine what it would look like if it were okay.**
3. **Pay attention to how it feels, how strong it is (0, none to 10, as strong as it could be).**
4. **Add some kind of connection to your body to speed up (accelerate*) the healing.**
5. **Keep noticing it until the feeling lessens, goes away, or stops changing.**

*Accelerators: imagination, acupuncture, bilateral stimulation, body position

The symptom or feeling will just evaporate,
or intensify and then release,
or associated thoughts, other symptoms, and emotions may come up,
or the memory (or memories) of where your body learned it may surface
or positive thoughts or feelings may come up.

Keep noticing until it stops changing!

*If nothing changes, either it's from an early experience or one that's life threatening (making it feel too dangerous to resolve on your own), or there is some conflict about it that needs to be resolved first. **So let whatever it's about go back into your (container) until we can review it together.** You can jot down what didn't change and tell me about it at our next appointment or leave me a message so I'll know that we need to check on it next time.

***Always let whatever is left at the end of your Re-View Time
go back into your container until you can give it your full attention again.***

Making a list and keeping it in the place where you do your Reviews will help your system feel confident that it will actually happen and make it easier to focus away from what still needs to be reviewed until your next therapy session or Review Time.

Bodies learn and they can unlearn too!

**This method is useful for learned physical reactions. If a symptom worsens, doesn't improve, or in any way, seems to have a physical cause, seek medical treatment!*

LEARNING (Re-Viewing/Processing/ReProcessing)

Remember:

1. We can't learn all that we need to learn from a disturbing experience at the time it occurs. We'll need to review it afterwards in order to ensure that we've identified what was dangerous and determine how to prevent it or respond optimally in the future. It's **BEST*** to do that as soon as possible
 2. When a distressing experience has been in our system for a long time, we will have developed the ability to react automatically to anything that seems similar to that experience. We not only need to review the original experience, but any experiences since then that continue to stand out or be distressing, particularly recent or current events and imagine future ones so that the entire neural network can be updated, **PAST → PRESENT → FUTURE**. See the "Re-View Time Instructions" below for how to process on your own).
 3. It's likely that there will also still be neural fragments (thoughts and/or feelings) left that just need to be noticed and will then "prune" themselves (just metabolize away).
 4. During sessions, we'll focus primarily on relearning from past experiences when you were most vulnerable. You can help yourself by allowing time each day to clear up those that are recent or may recur.
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Re-View Time Instructions (15-20 minutes daily, at the same time, if possible):

1. Take out of your Container (focus on):
 - What needs to be Reviewed, or
 - Ask yourself, "What do I need to focus on today?"
 2. See what image appears in your mind.
 - It might be a symbolic image, an image from a memory, even a picture of a word/words.
 3. Notice if any *thoughts* come to mind.
 - They may be about yourself or the situation, may make sense/be true or not.
 4. Notice whether there is any *feeling of emotional distress*.
 - Notice *how strong* it is (0-10)
 - Notice *where you feel it in your body*
 5. Focus on all that and accelerate your learning from the experience by adding:
 - Imagination
 - Back and forth eye movements
 - Alternating auditory tones
 - Alternating taps (Butterfly Hugs, toes, fingers, etc.)
 - EFT (Emotional Freedom Technique) taps or just tap where it feels right (acupressure)
 6. Stop when things stop changing or when your Review time is up for the day.
 - If you get positive thoughts and/or feelings stay with them until they stop changing.
 7. Let whatever is left, go back into the Container in whatever form it takes, until you can give it your full attention again.
 - Don't try to figure out what's left – remember, that's Re-Viewing/Processing
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It's **BEST** (Behavior/Emotion/Sensation/Thoughts) to fully experience an event as soon after it occurs as possible.

If we do, we'll shorten the time we spend in a state of alarm and quickly learn from the experience. Then we'll automatically apply the knowledge to current and future dangers (threats).

Trauma is an experience we're not prepared to handle.

Healthy/ Healing Habits

Our system is made to function on “automatic pilot” so that we don’t have to think about/ decide/ remember to do routine things. Your mind/ body/ spirit has developed many habit patterns over your life. Some are helpful and some are harmful. While we are “pruning” knowledge, physical responses and behaviors that are no longer useful, we want to enhance and incorporate helpful habits, which will create ongoing physical, emotional and spiritual health. Identify and practice what you need to do to care for yourself and others fully so that, when we complete reprocessing past, present, and future experiences, you’ll continue to learn easily and naturally, needing a specialist only when trauma immobilizes you. We are also very “timely” creatures, so doing things at the same time every day is consistent with the way we function best.

We need a balance of taking in energy (regenerating) and releasing energy. For example:

Sleeping and waking • eating and activity • work and play • time alone and time with others
giving and receiving love, time, money/ talents, attention, care

Include:

- Relationships (time and energy, giving *and* receiving love/ nurturance)
- Work/ achievement (for money, volunteer, home maintenance/ improvement)
- Play and Creativity (alone and with others)
- Sleep/ rest/ renewal
- Nourishment (food, food supplements, water/ liquids)
- Physical activities
- Spiritual activities
- Emotional release (experience both protective *and* pleasurable feelings) via imagination, and expression

Time of Day	Experience
	Note: <i>Let whatever still needs to be Re-Viewed go into your Container and whatever parts need to catch up, go to their Safe Place, so you can return feeling Relaxed and Ready (safe when you are safe).</i>
When you Awaken	Say, “ Everything I don’t need can be tucked away for now. ” When it’s all been taken care of, say the name of your Safe Place to let your body return to feeling Relaxed and Ready . Remind yourself to let any distress that occurs or surfaces during the day, be set aside in your Container until you can fully focus on it, at your designated Re-View Time or during a counseling session.
During the day	Each time you change activities: Let whatever you can’t take care of at the moment, go into your Container , then say the word(s) to help your body return to being Relaxed and Ready .
_____ (Re-View Time)	Open your Container, Re-View, Release, Relearn/ Repair what you need to (current & future, physical & emotional) via Imagination, EFT , or any other adaptive means. Let whatever is unfinished go back into your Container and remind yourself it’s okay to feel safe when you are safe, with your Relaxed and Ready word(s).
Before sleep	Be sure everything is set aside, then say the word(s) that take you back to feeling Relaxed and Ready . Notice how it feels for as long as you want. Remind yourself you can Re-View, Release, Relearn/ Repair everything safe to unlearn and learn alone during your DREAMS .

If your **Container**, **Safe Place** or **words** change, trust your system and allow it to happen. There’s a good reason. *At least two weeks of consistent practice are needed to make this a habit* so you can automatically be relaxed and aware, unless emotion is needed or something triggers an unprocessed memory. Then:

Thank your body and respond to whatever needs to be done at the time.

Container: _____ **Safe Place:** _____

Safe when you are safe (Relaxed and Ready): _____