

What To Do with Feelings

As we explore our pasts to find healing and become like Jesus, we may find that along the way there are some uncomfortable or distressing feelings. Feelings are not “bad” but often we do not know what to do when we have feelings, especially if they come unexpectedly. One important thing to remember is every feeling will pass. It is physically impossible to sustain emotions forever. If a feeling is overwhelming, remind yourself it will pass, like a wave, and you can simply wait out the wave. Below is a list of common feelings, descriptions, and things to do with those feelings to help yourself.

Sadness usually feels heavy, like a weight. You may feel tired, like your body is exhausted. You may experience tearfulness. Sadness is a feeling that tells us something was important and isn't what it was or should be. We may want to shut people out when we feel sad, but it can be a great time to reach out to others and ask for support.

Coping with Sadness:

- Remind yourself sadness isn't bad
- Consider what was important to you that is leading to sadness now
- Think about comforting things such as friends, family, or places that remind you of good things
- Do something that is comforting (text a friend, read a comforting scripture like Psalm 23, drink something warm)
- Remind yourself that Jesus experiences sadness (John 11:35 Jesus Wept)
- If you are feeling fatigued or low energy, try to move about, change rooms, or go for a walk

Anger usually feels like an increase in energy, a need to do something. You may experience an increase in temperature or tightness in your body. Anger is a feeling that tells us something is wrong and that we need to do something to change it. If something is not changeable, like our family situations or our past, we can feel like anger is overwhelming.

Coping with Anger:

- Take some deep breaths to help decrease the tension in your body
- Remind yourself anger isn't bad
- Remind yourself Jesus got angry (Mark 21:12-13 Jesus flipped tables)

- Do something with your increased energy like go for a walk, run in place, move your body in some way
- Think about what it is you wish could change or feels wrong that is leading to anger
- Consider if the situation your angry about has a solution to it, if not, consider what it would be like to accept the situation.

Grief is like sadness in that it is a heavy emotion that tends to lead to decrease energy. Our bodies slow down and realize that something important is gone.

Coping with grief:

- Acknowledge what is gone, lost, missing
- Remind yourself that grief is okay, it won't last forever
- Do something comforting (drink hot tea, take a nap)
- Reach out to someone who can listen or share in your grief
- Pray, remembering that God knows grief and has compassion to our suffering (2 Corinthians 1:3-5)

Anxiety/Fear is an emotion with increased energy. It can feel like tension in your body, difficulty breathing, and the feeling of needing to do something. Anxiety can come from future fears (what if this bad thing happens in the future?) or present fears (this is scary right now). Exploring our pasts can lead to fear and anxiety. Anxiety is a feeling that tells us there is danger (real or perceived, present or future) and motivates us to act to protect ourselves.

Coping with Anxiety/ Fear

- Take deep breaths to calm your body
- Remind yourself anxiety and fear aren't bad
- Acknowledge there is something that feels dangerous for you (either real or perceived, present or future)
- Remember Jesus experiences fear (Matthew 26:36-56 the Garden of Gethsemane)
- Do something to calm your body (take a bath, drink water or something else delicious)
- Do something with the increased energy in your body (go for a walk, try progressive muscle relaxation, do jumping jacks or some other exercise)

- Seek out sources of comfort such as talking with friends, reading scriptures, etc.

Shame usually comes when we feel bad about ourselves. It can feel like tightness in your body, wanting to hide or shrink away, and wanting to isolate from others. Shame is a sense of something being wrong with you as a person. Guilt can be similar but is usually connected to a specific behavior. While guilt can be beneficial in making behavioral changes, shame often leads us to feeling stuck about things we cannot change. Shame can often be underneath other emotions as well, like fear, anger, and sadness. You can identify the difference between guilt and shame because guilt is behavioral oriented and can often easily be changed (i.e. I yelled at my kids today, tomorrow I will not yell at them) where as shame is more general (I am a terrible parent, I am worthless).

Coping with Shame:

- Remind yourself you were made in the image of God
- Take some deep breaths and relax in your body
- Instead of isolating, actively seek someone out to spend time with
- Do something to actively care for yourself, like take a shower, eat good food, spend time with people who are enjoyable
- Consider the ways God made you good and list or name things specifically that reflect this (heart, soul, mind, and body).
- Name the things you feel ashamed about and consider taking them to God in prayer
- Remind yourself that there is no condemnation in Christ. (Romans 8:1)

Joy or Excitement is an emotion we often consider “good”, and it is! It may not seem like we need to cope with it. But sometimes we will experience joy in connection with other feelings. Remembering a loved one that has passed can bring both joy and grief. Joy usually feels like an open feeling, one that moves us towards people and experiences. It can feel light and energetic and tells us that there are meaningful things to share with others. If joy shows up with other feelings, the best way to cope is to acknowledge both feelings and give yourself permission to feel both.

These are generally categories of emotions. It can be helpful to use something like a feelings wheel to help you identify what you are feeling if you are not sure.

If you find these techniques difficult or that they don't seem helpful, talking with a trained counselor about feelings can be helpful. Check out the counseling resources provided in the guidebook.