

This Emotion's Exercise Is Your Next Step to Freedom From Addiction

This is a major part of addiction recovery. During our development years, many of us did not learn to identify or communicate feelings, and yet feelings can be one of the most treacherous and dangerous areas in our early recovery. Many addicts have at some point felt unloved, rejected or unappreciated, which puts them into a difficult place if they don't know how to express their feelings. As a way of dealing with feelings, many sex addicts end up medicating through an unhealthy activity. In any addiction, I find that feelings are something that addicts of any kind don't have much skill in fully expressing. This is just an issue of the lack of a particular skill. It is not a matter of a level of intelligence.

In the midst of the addiction, when an addict had a feeling and didn't know what it was, when they acted out, it went away. It was a simple solution. However, in recovery, you don't have the solution of acting out. You have the problem of having a feeling and not knowing what it is or what to do with it.

The following is an exercise that can help facilitate this. It is called the Feeling Exercise. If you need more explanation to complete this exercise, you can find it [here](#).

1. I feel _____ when _____.
2. I first remember feeling _____ when _____.

This exercise is difficult at first. It's like learning a new computer program. Although it may be frustrating, you will get familiar with it eventually and then wonder how you lived

without it. First, we identify the feeling. Without doing this part of the exercise, you can't do the second part, which is communicate. Pick a feeling word and fill in the blanks.

For example:

1. I feel calm when I go to the lake with my friend.
2. I first remember feeling calm when I was playing with an electric train set my mother bought me.

In this example, I am giving a picture. These are to be very specific experiences. What we are doing is creating files. Our emotions as addicts are similar to a messy desk. We are taking the papers off the desk in this exercise and putting them in a filing system that goes a, b, c, d and so on. In computer language, it's like having a database without file names. If we look for a file by name, we can't find it. If you're an addict, this makes you feel like you don't know what to do, think or feel, and so you act out. Being able to identify feelings is very important. Do this exercise daily for about three months so that your verbal language increases. Write them down, and you will be able to experience some feelings. After your first 30 days of abstinence, you are going to find yourself having some feelings. It is important to realize what you are feeling so that you don't relapse.

The second part of this feeling exercise is communication. You can do this exercise with a therapist or with someone in your recovery group. You will need to communicate the feeling sentences you have completed. I encourage you not to do this over the phone. Some may want to do this exercise with their partner or spouse. If you do this with your partner or spouse, it is important that you do *not* use your relationship in any way, shape or form as examples. An example of what *not* to do:

"I feel frustrated when you don't pick up your socks." You can feel frustrated when you drive down the highway or when the dog sleeps in your favorite chair, but don't aim it at your

partner, and don't use the word "you." This is the only way this exercise should be done with your partner; otherwise, it will lead to another way to battle each other.

If this exercise is done correctly, it can provide a safe place for you to communicate your feelings. While one person is sharing his or her feelings, the other can listen. The person listening shouldn't make comments on the feelings shared for 72 hours. This creates a sense of security for both to know they are safe to communicate their feelings. This exercise will accelerate moving you from feeling frozen to feeling thawed. This exercise will be like sitting in the microwave emotionally. Without this exercise, I find that addicts seem to have more relapses, and it also takes a lot longer time to develop intimacy, which we will discuss next.

If you are really interested in moving your emotional development forward, I highly recommend my book Emotional Fitness. It can take anyone, addicted or not, from emotional weakness to emotional strength. The exercises it contains provide a road map to better identify, communicate, feel and even intelligently switch feelings.

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