

Understanding This Relational Concept Is Crucial for Your Emotional Fitness

What is a feeling? Now that's the million-dollar question. When was the last time you really tried to define what a feeling or an emotion actually is?

Is an emotion purely a chemical process that happens to you? If you have ever experienced a feeling, you know it is way more than just a chemical process in your brain. The purpose of emotions has some perceptual qualities. Take a walk in the forest in the dark and just as your senses are heightened, your feelings are heightened. Using a more common example, during even just an ordinary day at work you emote, sense and feel your environment just as you do in your relationships with people.

Perception can easily be a purpose of emotions. Responding to environmental stimuli or to relationships is definitely a function of your emotions. You all have had the experience of walking by someone in a public area and feeling their acceptance of you. Their emotions are responding to their environment even though they may never have spoken about or thought much about their response.

Your emotions can respond to threats in your environment. You can respond emotionally if you feel someone is angry or upset at you. Try not to respond when your child does something amazing. Your emotions will just well up within you, again, without much thought.

Emotions can change an environment as well. Think of this as a function that few really understand and master except great actors and actresses. Take being around someone who just insists on staying positive, loving or excited. In time, their

raw emotions can change the environment.

Now that we have a working understanding of what an emotion is and its purpose, I am going to switch topics and discuss what feelings are not. When speaking with clients of all ages, genders, beliefs and backgrounds, I am absolutely amazed at what people believe feelings and emotions really are. Some well-meaning therapists have told my clients some real whoppers as to what feelings are. In light of these experiences, I want to spend a few moments on what feelings are not.

Feelings are not facts. I know this may come as a surprise to some, but feelings are definitely not facts. The fact may be that you are having a feeling, but your feeling is not a fact.

Here is the problem: Feelings are genuine, but through some internal processes you can have misinterpretation before, during or after your experience of that feeling. You can assume meaning where no meaning can be found in the rational world.

Feeling a feeling is just that, a momentary event that in no way indicates a fact is within a hundred miles of your experience. As you move forward in your emotional fitness, you will be able to see that feelings are just feelings. Then you will also have less need to strongly interpret them. The more you lose your hold on a meaning or interpretation of an emotion, the healthier you will be for yourself and those around you.

Feelings are not truth. Some people go beyond the belief that their feelings are facts to a belief that their feelings are expressions of truth. For me, truth is external, never changing, while by definition, feelings are temporal and ever changing. Just today, you have probably had many different feelings. Some of you had different feelings about the same event or person as you collected more information or saw the

situation through a wider lens.

When a person believes feelings are truth, he or she is set up to be regularly misunderstood, avoided and can become demanding, controlling and easily offended by anyone who doesn't agree with his or her emotional reality.

The danger zone happens when you see your emotions as truth, especially the absolute truth; you are on a dangerous path to insanity.

Your emotions need to be identified and processed for you to be emotionally healthy. As you move away from the perception that feelings are expressions of fact or truth, you will be more capable of having the ability to identify and process your emotions, leading you to emotional fitness.

Feelings are not needs. I have had clients improperly taught that their feelings are needs. The next thing they are taught is that their spouse or others are to meet these needs.

Let me clarify what a need really is. A need is not a want, desire, wish or luxury. A need is not something you need in order to be comfortable. A need is something you need to stay alive; without it you would die. Often people who buy in to the idea that emotions are needs enslave those around them to meet their needs for almost anything, and come to resent others when it doesn't happen.

When one person uses the word "need" repeatedly, it's not truthful and often causes others to feel manipulated and avoid the person, if possible. This person purchased an idea of "I feel, so I need, so someone else must meet my need."

They are close to the right idea. They do feel and, again, emotions are just emotions. An emotion can help you discover a lack in your immediate life. However, once you find a lack in your life, it is your responsibility to fill that lack and meet that need.

When we believe feelings are needs, we make life harder for ourselves and those around us. However, a feeling may lead you to a legitimate lack. When we take responsibility to address our emotional directives, we are more emotionally fit adults. My hope is that as you decide to take the journey of emotional fitness, you will be amazing as you experience feelings in your entire being. {eoa}

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