

# **Emotion-Focused Journal**

A companion to Experiential Dynamic Psychotherapy

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## **How To Use This Journal**

This journal is meant to serve as a companion to experiential, dynamic psychotherapy. It was developed in response to clients' requests for some way to process upsetting events that occur between therapy sessions. These questions are meant to guide you in examining (with love, care, compassion and precision) your internal experience during or while reflecting on challenging or unsettling life events.

You may copy additional journal pages or respond to these questions in a separate journal/log. You may find value in reviewing entries during the therapy process to assist you in both becoming aware of patterns in thinking, feeling and behavior and in evaluating your progress toward your therapeutic goals.

I. Sample Journal Entry

II. Patient Journal

III. Appendix

## Sample Journal Entry

Upsetting events happen, and we don't always respond in ways that are consistent with how we'd like to treat ourselves or others. Use the following questions to guide you in examining an incident that triggered a behavior which was not congruous with how you'd like treat yourself and/or those around you.

1. What happened? Visualize and describe the event. Include where you were/are, who was/is there and anything you were/are aware of thinking and feeling. (Use the back of this page if you need additional space.)

*My daughter never tells me what's really going on in her life. I found out she has a new boyfriend from my other daughter. She told me over the phone in a very matter of fact way, "You know Sarah invited us to meet her new boyfriend and we are all going up there next weekend". I wasn't---and know I won't be---invited. I got off the phone and felt depressed.*

2. As this event is happening or as remember and visualize what happened in detail are you aware of being anxious? Anxiety often happens outside our awareness. For signs of anxiety, see Appendix I (If no, skip to #7)

*Yes.*

3. Rate your anxiety on a scale of 1-10 ("1" being completely relaxed, "10" being extremely anxious)

*6*

10	Extremely Anxious
9	
8	
7	
6	
5	
4	
3	
2	
1	
0	Completely Relaxed

4. How do you experience this anxiety in your body right now? What shifts do you notice, what symptoms are you aware of in your body and/or mind? (See Appendix I)

*I feel tightness in my neck and shoulders, my breathing is restricted, I'm feeling very warm. My thoughts are racing.*

5. If you are feeling anxious, your body is responding "as if" you are in danger. Are you in any real danger right now? (See Appendix II)

*No*

6. Pick an anxiety regulating activity (See Appendix III). Follow the instructions to perform the activity. Which activity did you choose?

*Self-Directed Muscle Relaxation*

7. After performing the activity, where is your anxiety on a scale of 1-10? Describe what has shifted in your body/and or mind?

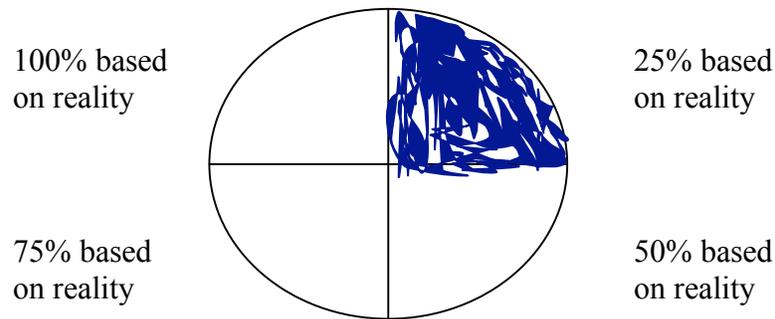
*Anxiety is at 4.*

*My shoulders are more relaxed and I'm breathing more easily.*

8. How do you imagine someone close to you might react if you told them about this event?

*I would never tell my girlfriend, Rachel, that my children don't want to be close to me because she would think I was a horrible person. Her kids love her.*

9. Sometimes our assumptions about how others see or feel about us are not rooted in reality. In fact, these assumptions often reflect our own judgments. When we draw conclusions like this, we prevent the possibility of greater closeness. Pause and consider based solely on your previous experiences with this person: How much of this assumption truly reflects your actual experiences with him/her. Shade in your answer--if 0%, leave the circle as is.



Explain.

I once heard Rachel say something negative about this woman whose kids don't like her. This is what comes to mind, but what I have experienced is that she has always been supportive of me.

10. As this event is happening or as you remember and visualize what happened in detail are you aware of making any judgments about the situation, yourself or others who were involved? List one or more of the judgments and include any negative self-talk.

Yes. I'm judging myself and blaming myself: "You're a terrible mother." I'm judging my kids too when I say they are "damaged" or "messed up".

11. What happens if you let go of any judgments you have about the situation, yourself or others who were involved and just focus on the facts? (See Appendix IV)

Then I would say that it's reality that they don't want to share with me and none of us are bad people because of that. I can say I would "prefer" if I had a close relationship with them instead of they "should" want to have a close relationship with me. I might also ask if there is anything I can do to gain understanding into this problem.

12. Are you aware of distorted, inaccurate or "worry" thoughts? (See Appendix V)

I'm thinking if my kids don't love me no one else could ever love me. I am unlovable.

13. What might be a more accurate thought/thoughts?

I did the best I could given my limitations when they were little. They have limitations too. I'm working on myself now.

14. Are you aware of experiencing shame or toxic guilt as this event is happening or as you remember and visualize what happened in detail? (For a distinction between healthy remorse and toxic guilt see Appendix VI.)

Yes. I feel guilty for messing up my children.

15. If shame and toxic guilt are present, describe (as best as you can) how they are functioning in this situation?

*My guilt is keeping me from feeling anything toward Sarah. It's all coming back at me.*

16. Are you aware of using any defenses to manage your feelings? (See Appendix VII)

*I'm minimizing how hurt I am. I'm saying, "It's not a big deal, just get over it."*

17. What is the cost of continuing to use this/these defense(s) in this way? What happens to you? How does continuing the automatic/involuntary use of this defense affect your goal/progress?

*I never find peace or clarity around what is going on inside me when I feel rejected. I stay depressed.*

18. What emotions are you aware of as this event is happening or as you remember and visualize what happened in detail? (See Appendix VIII) If you are aware of feeling more than one emotion which emotion feels strongest at the moment?

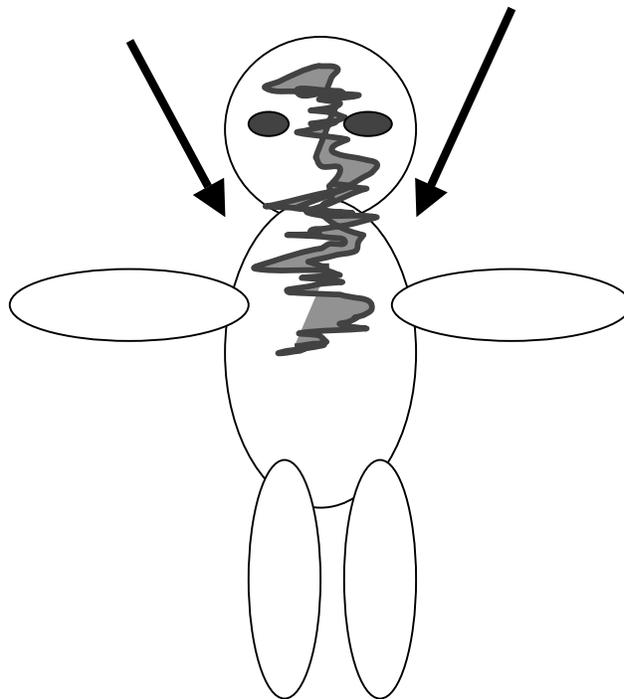
*Sad and angry. Sad feels strongest.*

19. What is the intensity of the feeling? (“1” being barely there and “10” being overwhelmingly powerful)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

20. Stay with the feeling. If you set aside the judgments and negative thoughts, if you attend to and reduce your anxiety, if you choose not to use a defense---how do you experience this feeling in your body? Take some time to notice what sensations arise when you make feeling this feeling a priority. Use words to describe and/or draw what you sense on the image below. Include color, intensity, direction of energy.....)

Draw...



Describe....(Use the back of this page if you need more space.)

*It feels like a downward force, I feel heaviness in my head and chest and pressure behind my eyes.*

21. This exploration you have done inside yourself may have violated many old rules and taken you away from what you've been taught about how to attend to yourself and how you normally perceive others. Allow yourself the opportunity to reflect on and process any remaining anxiety, judgments, thoughts, and feelings using the process above. Notice and make note of any defenses. Record what you experience here and use the back of this page if you need additional space.

I also feel angry, and I notice my anxiety go up as soon as I feel that--anger toward the girls. I start to get depressed and I know that means I'm directing my anger at me. All I can do now is notice that. I don't feel in touch with the anger in my body yet---but I know it is there.

22. Based on what you noticed about your anxiety, judgments, thoughts and feelings can you imagine another way in which you might behave (treat yourself or others differently) should this or a similar situation occur in the future?

Yes. I'd like to show compassion toward myself and let myself feel my sad and angry feelings without blame---rather than focusing on figuring out everyone else or turning my anger on myself. I'd like to just say---"you're sad and you're angry right now, aren't you?" And be ok with that.

## Patient Journal

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1. What happened? Visualize and describe the event. Include where you were/are, who was/is there and anything you were/are aware of thinking and feeling. (Use the back of this page if you need additional space.)

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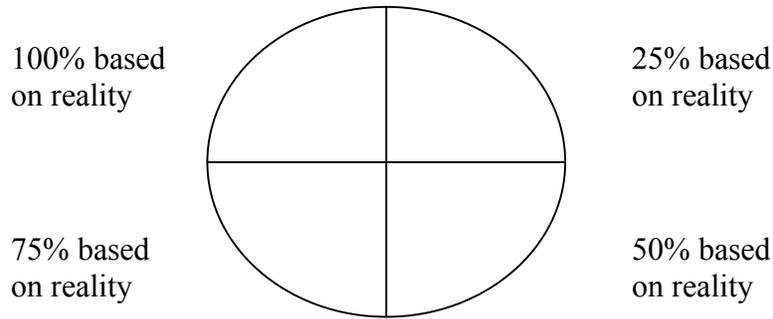
5. If you are feeling anxious, your body is responding “as if” you are in danger. Are you in any real danger right now? (See Appendix II)

6. Pick an anxiety regulating activity (See Appendix III). Follow the instructions to perform the activity. Which activity did you choose?

7. After performing the activity where is your anxiety on a scale of 1-10? Describe what has shifted in your body/and or mind?

8. How do you imagine someone close to you might react if you told them about this event?

9. Sometimes our assumptions about how others see or feel about us are not rooted in reality. In fact, these assumptions often reflect our own judgments. When we draw conclusions like this, we prevent the possibility of greater closeness. Pause and consider based solely on your previous experiences with this person: How much of this assumption truly reflects your actual experiences with him/her. Shade in your answer--if 0%, leave the circle as is.



Explain.

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11. What happens if you let go of any judgments you have about the situation, yourself or others who were involved and just focus on the facts? (See Appendix IV)

12. Are you aware of distorted, inaccurate or “worry” thoughts? (See Appendix V)

13. What might be a more accurate thought/thoughts?

14. Are you aware of experiencing shame or toxic guilt as this event is happening or as you remember and visualize what happened in detail? (For a distinction between healthy remorse and toxic guilt see Appendix VI.)

15. If shame and toxic guilt are present, describe (as best as you can) how they are functioning in this situation?

16. Are you aware of using any defenses to manage your feelings? (See Appendix VII)

17. What is the cost of continuing to use this/these defense(s) in this way? What happens to you? How does continuing the automatic/involuntary use of this defense affect your goal/progress?

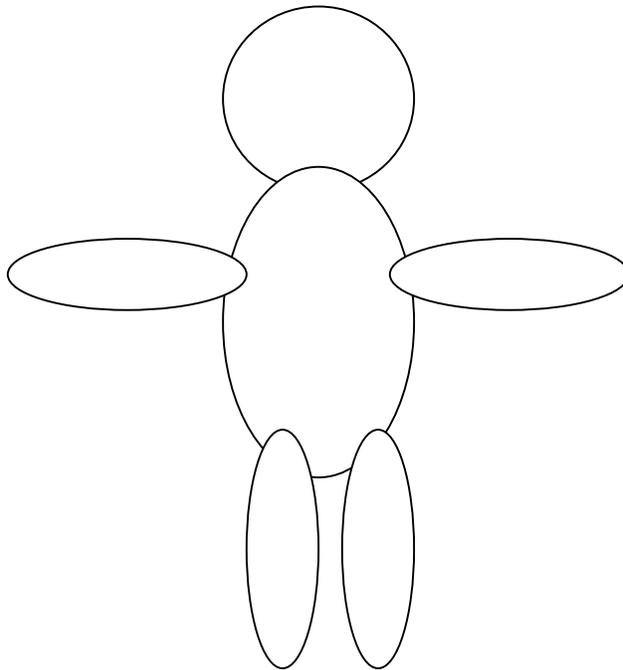
18. What emotions are you aware of as this event is happening or as you remember and visualize what happened in detail? (See Appendix VIII). If you are aware of feeling more than one emotion which emotion feels strongest at the moment?

19. What is the intensity of the feeling? (“1” being barely there and “10” being overwhelmingly powerful)

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22. Based on what you noticed about your anxiety, judgments, thoughts and feelings can you imagine another way in which you might behave (treat yourself or others differently) should this or a similar situation occur in the future?

**Copy and insert additional journal pages here.**

## Appendix

### Appendix I Symptoms of Anxiety

Anxiety may be felt in different places in your body and mind. These include:

1. Striated muscles (muscles under conscious control)---you may experience:

Tension in your jaw  
Tightness in neck/shoulders/arms/chest  
Clenched fists  
Sighing respiration  
Dry mouth  
Tension headache  
Tightness in belly, legs, feet

2. Smooth muscles (muscles of organs and blood vessels)---you may experience:

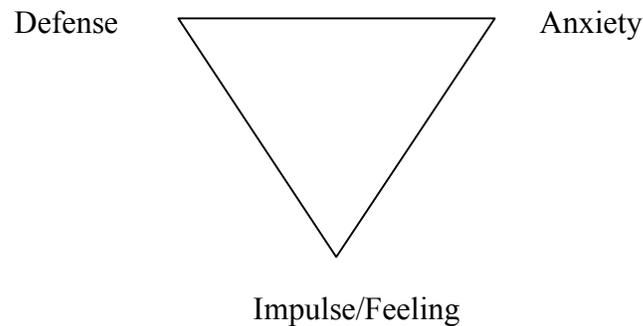
Constipation  
Diarrhea  
Bladder urgency  
Jelly legs/generalized weakness  
Migraine  
Hypertension  
Asthma

3. Cognitive or perceptual distortions---you may experience:

Poor memory  
Confusion  
Dissociation  
Fainting  
Foggy feeling  
Dizziness  
Ringing of the ears  
Visual distortions  
Difficulty thinking or paying attention  
Anoxia headache  
Relaxation of iris/out-of-focus vision,  
Inability to understand speech of another or form your own verbal thoughts  
Distortions of space  
Inability to sequence/plan

## Appendix II Real Danger v/s False Alarm

When you are anxious consider that your body is enacting a “threat response” even in the absence of any real danger. It can be helpful to label the physical responses you feel as a “false alarm” alerting you not to real danger, but to the existence of avoided (and feared) feelings. For example, as you begin to feel anger toward a co-worker for being overly critical of you in a staff meeting, you might notice that your stomach gets queasy and then you start to tell yourself that what he/she did was really no big deal. Your feelings of anger triggered a false alarm that may be fueled by messages from early caregivers that you are “too sensitive”. In order to shut off the alarm (return to status quo) you use the defense of minimization---telling yourself what happened to you was no big deal. This mechanism is best represented by David Malan’s Triangle of Conflict which looks like this:



## Appendix III Anxiety regulating activities

Anxiety can add considerable suffering to the experiencing of painful feelings thereby creating and prolonging unnecessary distress. When you are anxious:

- Label your anxiety as an indication of avoided feeling (as opposed to real danger or external threat).
- Carefully attend to how you are experiencing this anxiety in your body and mind.
- Try one of the anxiety-regulating activities below. To download audio recordings of the following visit: [http://feldenkraiswestla.com/community\\_links.html](http://feldenkraiswestla.com/community_links.html)

### Scanning For Support

Sit with your feet on the floor and your hands resting comfortably on your legs. Feel the contact your feet make with the ground. Direct your attention up the long bones of your legs feeling the back of your thighs against the chair beneath you. Notice your sitting bones and the contact they make with the chair. Feel the contact your back makes with the back of the chair. Are some parts of your back in greater contact with the chair than others? Just notice. Notice how your hands rest on your legs. Take in once more your contact with all the surfaces that are supporting you---your feet on the floor, your legs

and sitting bones on the seat of the chair, your back against the back of the chair and your hands on your legs. What effect does focusing on all that supports you have on your body (heart rate, breathing, muscle tension) and state of mind?

### Self-Directed Muscle Relaxation

This exercise can be done in any position. Bring your attention to your neck and shoulders and invite the muscles there to relax. If you like, use the image of melting wax---the muscles of your neck and shoulders get warm and soften. Allow this sensation to travel down your arms. The muscles of your upper arms and then lower arms soften as you attend to them. Now relax the muscles of your hands. Bring your attention to the muscles in your upper back and chest allowing them to release and then to the muscles of your lower back and abdomen---relax those muscles as well. Send warmth and an invitation to soften to the muscles of your butt and then your upper legs. Relax the muscles of your lower legs and feet. Feel these sensations of warmth and soft relaxation throughout your whole body.

### Four-Seven-Eight Breathing

This exercise can be done in any position. Bring your attention to your breath. You will be breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth. Keep the tip of your tongue in light contact with the top of your mouth (just behind your top teeth). Inhale for a count of 4. Hold your breath for a count of 7. Exhale slowly and smoothly for a count of 8. Pause briefly and begin another round. Repeat for 10-12 rounds: Inhale 4, hold 7, Exhale 8, pause and repeat.

### 5-Sense Sensing of the Present Moment

While you can *think about* the past or future----you can only *sense* the present moment. In this exercise you will spend a few minutes focused only on what you take in through your 5 senses. Beginning with what you see---notice the colors, shapes, light and movement of people and things around you. You may close your eyes if you wish and attend to the blackness behind your eyelids. Even with your eyes closed you may notice movement and light and varying shades of darkness. Shift your focus now to attend to what you hear---the sounds in your immediate surroundings and any sounds you notice coming from a distance. What do you smell? Spend a moment paying attention only to what you smell. What is the taste in your mouth? What are you touching? Feel the contact your skin makes with your clothing. Notice the temperature of the air against your skin, and notice the contact you make with the surface you are sitting, standing or lying on. Take another moment to focus on the present moment---taking in the now: what you see, hear, smell, taste and touch.

### Repeat a Calming Phrase

In this exercise you will repeat a calming phrase or bring to mind a peaceful image. You may have to experiment with different phrases or images to find one that has a calming effect. As you repeat this phrase or hold this image in mind notice the effect it has on you internally. What effect does this phrase or this image have on your breathing, your heart rate, do you notice any sensations of warmth and/or relaxation? Spend a few moments repeating your phrase or holding your image in mind and noticing the effect.

### **Appendix IV Judgments**

Reflecting on your life past and present can be painful at times. Notice as you reflect---is it your observing mind or your analyzing mind that takes charge of this process? Both minds are important, but when you find you are being critical of yourself invite your observing mind to step forward. With this mind you can see yourself as you were or are without imposing a judgment about how you should be or should have been and without a wish to be or have been something different (see the facts without evaluating or judging).

No one escapes being disappointed. Everyone is at times disappointed in themselves or those around them. If you find yourself disappointed often, ask yourself if you get caught up in “shoulds”. Simply substituting “prefer” can go a long way toward giving yourself and those around you a big break. What happens if you trade in the idea that your husband “should” buy you flowers on your anniversary with, “I would prefer if he remembered me with a gift on special occasions”. So you’d prefer him to do one thing, but is it a crime that he isn’t exactly as you’d like him to be? Maybe you would prefer to be someplace at this point in your life and you are not there yet. Maybe you would prefer to have skills you have not yet developed or gifts you just don’t have. How might seeing each of these as preferences---rather than something you should have (or some way you or someone else should be) change how you feel about yourself and others?

**Meditation and Your Observing Mind:** Mindfulness meditation practices are a great way to strengthen your observing mind. In Mindfulness meditation one practices observing the present moment without judgment and without clinging to any element of experience. Mindfulness meditation practices are not one size fits all. Some people at some times in their lives find “inwardly focused” meditation (focusing on your breath or internal sensations) to be destabilizing. If this is true for you right now try one of these outwardly focused meditations: walking meditation, eating meditation, listening meditation or nature meditation.

- Walking Meditation: [www.wildmind.org](http://www.wildmind.org)
- Eating Meditation: [www.metatronics.net/eat/](http://www.metatronics.net/eat/)
- Listening Meditation: [www.radicalhappiness.com](http://www.radicalhappiness.com)
- Nature Meditation: [www.meditationoasis.com](http://www.meditationoasis.com)

## **Appendix V Thought Distortions**

Notice if you have a tendency toward all-or-nothing thinking. Do you often see things as black or white? Good or evil? Terrible or wonderful?

Notice if you jump to conclusions or personalize things that actually have nothing to do with you.

Do you worry about things over which you have no control?

Are you victim to “Scarcity Mentality” (fear of not having enough)?

Do you believe you are being punished when things don’t go your way?

Do you often think others have something against you/are out to get you?

Do you think everyone else has it easier/is better off than you?

Notice if you have a tendency to think yourself into a state of hopelessness.

## **Appendix VI Shame and Toxic Guilt**

Healthy remorse (like any other feeling) helps guide our actions. When we hurt someone in a careless or intentional way, we need to feel guilty. This creates a healthy conscience. Guilt used for the purposes of self-punishment or to deny ourselves our right to feel our feelings, however, is toxic and self-harming.

Shame, like toxic guilt, can be used to push away healthy adaptive responses (like getting angry when someone hurts you or feeling compassion for yourself). For this reason shame can be thought of as a “cover” emotion---it functions to cover other, more adaptive affects (healthy feeling responses).

## **Appendix VII Common Defenses**

Everyone uses defense mechanisms. The conscious, voluntary use of a tactical defense here and there makes it possible for people to live together and move toward their goals. If someone cuts in front of you at Starbucks, you can choose not to deepen your experience of anger toward that person. This choice may be based on the fact that you will never see this person again and you’d rather not waste your energy getting upset (or more importantly---the understanding that a knock down, drag out fight will only further delay the arrival of your Grande Soy Chai). This is a healthy use of a defense. When defenses are employed habitually, involuntarily or out of a need to punish one’s self, however, (like putting up a wall between yourself and someone you love) their use is problematic.

So how do you know if using a defense in a certain situation was a healthy choice/served your greater good? That’s one of the things this journal is designed to help you figure out. And that’s why you’re asked to examine---Were you anxious? Were you judging yourself or others? Did you experience shame or toxic guilt? Did you feel you had a choice? Could you have behaved differently if you wanted to/would you want to behave differently next time?

Being able to recognize defensive behaviors is the first step in examining how they function in a given situation. Was this behavior a servant of your healthy side/did it serve your greater good or was this behavior an agent of your Punitive Super Ego/did it function to punish you or perpetuate an ignoring and/or self-punishing stance?

Below are a list of common defenses.

#### *Repressive Defenses*

Intellectualization (to block feeling with reasoning)

Rationalization (to make excuses)

Minimization (to not take seriously)

Displacement (to direct feared feelings unto unthreatening object)

Reaction Formation (to feel/ behave in direct opposition to your truth)

#### *Regressive Defenses*

Projection (to transfer one's own feelings to the outside world)

Denial (to abnegate an unpleasant truth)

Dissociation (to disrupt integrated functioning)

Acting out (to perform rather than bear experiencing of)

Somatization (to turn mental pain into physical pain)

#### *Tactical Defenses*

(Verbal)

Sarcasm

Argumentativeness

Rumination (worrying/brooding)

Vagueness/Evasiveness

Deflection (changing the subject)

Diversification (jumping from one topic to another)

Obsessional indecisiveness

Being contradictory

Helplessness

Passive compliance

Talking over your feelings

(Non-verbal)

Avoiding eye contact

Defensive body language (crossed arms and legs...)

Smiling or laughing over feelings

Weepiness

Temper tantrums

If you notice yourself using a defense as a means of avoiding a more self-caring/adaptive action (i.e. having a tantrum rather than setting a healthy boundary), use the triangle of conflict introduced in Appendix II to examine this response.

What feeling are you avoiding? (feeling pole of the triangle)  
How are you avoiding that feeling? (defense pole)  
Why are you avoiding that feeling? (anxiety pole)  
What would be a more self-caring response? (adaptive action)

Using the example above one might sum this up as follows:

I screamed at my husband (defense) for asking me to pick up his dry cleaning when I already had a lot to do today. In reflecting on this I can see that I was angry (feeling) and felt selfish for not wanting to do it (anxiety). I could have just said, "Honey, I have a lot to do. Could you do it yourself or can it wait until tomorrow?" (self-caring/adaptive action)

### **Appendix VIII Feelings**

"Most of us believe we *are* fully experiencing our feelings, but if emotional suffering persists, it is safe to assume that *we are not*. It is common to think we are experiencing our feelings when we are in fact internalizing or acting them out. Examples of internalization might be overeating or withdrawing when we are hurt or angry; externalization might be some form of verbal discharge, such as hurting accusations. Either pattern usually is learned in one's family of origin, and is highly destructive to self and others." Susan Warren Warshaw

Feelings are internal resources that guide our actions and help us get what we need and want. Anger, for instance, can guide us to set healthy boundaries---grief brings acceptance of loss, love can drive us toward that which brings us joy. Feelings can also be acted out or internalized in ways that keep us from creating close relationships and meaningful work experiences or finding peace within ourselves. For example, acting out anger as a way of avoiding the full experiencing of angry feelings or turning one's anger against the self and becoming depressed will only lead to prolonged and unnecessary suffering.

A fully experienced feeling has 3 parts:

- Cognitive: What is the feeling? Name it accurately. (Love)
- Physiological Response: How do you experience this feeling in your body? What sensations do you notice? (Warmth in my chest)
- Motor Impulse: What does the feeling want to do? How does this feeling want to be expressed through your body? (I want to hug my friend)

The website [www.emotionallyvague.com](http://www.emotionallyvague.com) is a wonderful resource for anyone interested in how feelings are universally experienced in the body.

Apparently it takes a village to design a journal. Many thanks to Susan Warren Warshow, MSW, MFT, Bruce Ammons, PhD and Josh Peter, MSW for invaluable feedback and encouragement.

Dr. Josette ten Have-de Labije's "Camera Exercise" as presented on Dr. Robin L. Kay's website ([www.DrRobinKay.com](http://www.DrRobinKay.com)) has been a self-care staple of mine, and it's something I have shared with all of my clients. That process has greatly informed this process. Many thanks, Robin and Josette.

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