

HOW TO DESCRIBE A FEELING

1. Describe from experience, e.g. ". . . the time we walked the beach . . ."
 2. Recognize the difference in each other's viewpoints.
 3. Disregard the number of words written. Quality — not quantity — is what counts. Great depth can be revealed in only a few words.
 4. Answers to "why" usually do not describe a feeling. Such answers explain what caused the feeling. So, "I feel good because . . ." is an explanation — not a description. But, "I feel as good as the time you sent the flowers" is a description.
 5. Sometimes you can relate a feeling by identifying it with part of your body, e.g. "I feel like I've got butterflies in my stomach."
- Feelings are morally neutral. Only our actions and judgments are good or bad, right or wrong. Feelings just are.

At times we may fear "negative" feelings, because we've been told to "think positively." Yet, negative feelings need to be shared.

However, negative feelings are often judgments rather than true feelings. "I hate snow" is a judgment. True negative feelings, if left unshared, can result in a big blow-up, a feeling of complete rejection, total frustration, etc.

Each spouse can have — and usually does have — quite different feelings on the same subject. This is good, because there is a challenge to really reach out and understand the other. In the process, I too can be enriched.

Sometimes, a spouse fears that he or she may be dominated if a true understanding of feelings does emerge. There is a fear that the self may be lost. But this is not so. True empathy does not mean becoming the other; it means "feeling with" the other.

REFLECTIONS: WRITING FEELINGS

Feelings may be described in terms of:

1. ethnic, cultural or educational background
2. personal interest and experience
3. spouse's personal interests and experience
4. shared experience as a couple.

Time is valuable. Time spent in writing one's personal reflection for one's spouse is very valuable time and makes the reflection a true gift of love.

One obstacle you may encounter is a lack of vocabulary. At first, just try to do the best you can and realize that in trying you will grow in your ability. But perhaps the best way to begin is to use your own experience to describe your feelings.

REASONS FOR WRITING

1. Usually we shed our masks when writing. This is not the case in face-to-face conversation when we try to shield ourselves from close observation.
2. Writing leaves me free to be myself, sometimes even to my own surprise.
3. I can maintain closer contact with myself as I write. It gives me time to think about and appreciate my own feelings.
4. One spouse is usually the faster talker and thinker. Writing gives the slower spouse a chance to catch up and really express him/her self.
5. Talking can distort my feelings. Or it can mask the feelings of the other because I become more interested in rebutting or reacting to the statement made.

6. We can write intimacies and silly romantic things that we might never have the courage to say out loud.

GET AT THE REAL FEELINGS. If you follow a regular regimen of dialoging about certain preset questions, some days you may not want to dialog on these questions. Why? You have strong feelings about something else. Use the opportunity to express your feelings about that something else. Not to attack, but to express the reality of your feelings. It's far better to express yourself about dominant, present feelings than to let the opportunity slip by with some lame excuse that you have nothing to say about today's question.

As you exchange notebooks, you may be surprised to learn that your spouse has strong feelings about a certain subject. Perhaps you have no feelings at all about the same subject. Good! You're beginning to learn the mystery of the other. Writing helps you realize that you may have been taking the gift of love for granted. Now you have the opportunity to learn a little more about yourself and your spouse.

As you become more tuned in to each other, a moment comes when you really know how your spouse feels at that moment. You are becoming more sensitively aware of each other at all times.

Writing down our true negative feelings puts them into perspective. Rejection may be at the bottom of anger. The chance to think about your anger as you write will usually unearth the feeling of rejection. Probably, you could not do this, if you were verbally sparring with your spouse. So writing can help prevent walls being built up.

TECHNIQUES FOR SUCCESSFUL DIALOG

1. Invest in two spiral notebooks.
2. Choose a question the night before or choose many questions to cover a week or more. Start with non-threatening topics. Be sure questions are specific and pertain to your relationship. (Example: Not "How do I feel when you buy things for yourself?" But "How did you/I feel when you bought the Hi-Fi set last week?")
3. Separate during personal reflection and writing.
4. Write your personal reflection as a love letter rather than a diary. Begin it with praise, compliment or a warm shared experience.
5. Write honest feelings in loving detail.
 - a. If you can substitute "I think" for "I feel" and the sentence makes sense, it is not a feeling.
 - b. "I feel" followed by an adjective or adverb is a feeling. Examples: I feel tired, nervous, lonely, etc.
 - c. Do not garbage dump, i.e., do not level criticism or blame on your spouse. Speak from "I", not "you"
 - d. Do not try to defend feelings. They are neither right nor wrong, they just are.
 - e. Sharing closely with your spouse may cause you to discover the attitudes from which your feelings spring. You may wish to examine these attitudes if they are injurious to your relationship.
6. Do your dialog during prime time.
7. Dialog in an atmosphere of privacy.
8. My personal reflection is a gift of myself, give it with a kiss.
9. Read reflection twice without commenting. Read with your head and then with your heart.
10. In dialog, reach out to touch your partner's feelings and reveal yourself as you really are.
 - a. It's not a time to manipulate.
 - b. It's not a time to problem solve.
11. Listen with love and understanding.
12. Discipline is necessary in order for all this to work.
13. When conjugal dialog seems at a stand still, try using some of these phrases to draw from your spouse a greater understanding of his feeling.
 - a. "Tell me more about that feeling."
 - b. "Is it (the feeling) like (instance when you think you had a similar feeling?)"
 - c. "How do you feel about revealing this to me?"
 - d. "Do you feel any differently about saying it than

you did writing it down?"

- e. "Describe the feeling to me in terms of a color. How does it taste, smell, feel, sound, etc? How does it affect me physically, (I feel queasy.)?"
 - f. "Do you feel differently about it when you know we share the same feeling?"
14. Don't get hung-up on technique.

We are anxious to dialog well, but sometimes we become **too** involved with the technique. The primary purpose of our dialog is to bring us closer in our relationship. "Relationship" must involve more than one. (A decision to "reach out" plus a decision "to be reached".)

A. Reflection

1. Writing for the other's sake (to transplant feelings)
2. Question should concern our relationship.
3. What is the feeling?
4. Feeling in relationship to spouse.
5. Describe so spouse can feel it.
6. How do I feel revealing this to you?

The reflection prepares us for dialog. It is necessary to get our deep and honest feelings down. But the reflection is then "dead". We dialog on how we feel "now", not when we wrote the reflection.

B. Dialog

1. Face one another
2. Touch one another
3. Dialog on "now feelings"

How does my "love letter" make you feel?

How do I feel about your feelings?

How do I feel about the feelings we are "now" hearing and revealing?

How do I feel about the feeling I just shared?

Which of my feelings do you feel most concern about? (Vice Versa)

How do you feel when I am questioning you on this?

Select the feeling you will reach for.

Do you still feel that way "now", more or less "now"?

Describe "now" feeling.

We do not just have a relationship. We are "in" a relationship. It is constantly changing, because we are constantly changing. That is why we dialog regularly.

There are many difficulties in dialog —

finding the time
finding the right time
finding questions
getting to feelings . . . and
on . . . and on

But these are only symptoms of the real problem

DO WE REALLY WANT IT ENOUGH?

We have reasons for missing dialog, but there is no excuse. It is simply a "cop out" when we excuse ourselves when we don't do it or when we don't do it well.

To start dialoging **again**, (after we let it slip) is much tougher than continuing our regular dialog.

We can ask ourselves what is our attitude toward our dialog?

1. Do we excuse ourselves when we miss?
2. Do we often miss on weekends or on nights out?
3. Is our dialog a routine thing?
4. Do we spend the full time? (Written reflection and dialog)
5. Do our questions skip along the surface from one topic to another?
6. Do we give it prime time?

URGENCY (Yearning for Dialog)

To build our commitment to our regular dialog, we must build a real sense of urgency. Our goal is to create this feeling of urgency, (a yearning) and we may pass

through many stages (and sometimes drift back again and again) along the way.

Ask ourselves "why we dialog?"

1. Appropriate — when it's expected (at an Image or Renewal).
2. Convenient — when the time is available or the topic light and easy (but not on weekends).
3. Preventive — when we fear we are slipping, or to solve a problem.
4. Routine — because we need it (we're afraid not to!)
5. Urgent — we want it!

Reaching our goal of URGENCY is work! We have to give it importance in time, topics, and attitude. We've got to make it the most important time of our day.

1. Prime Time — build the day around it.
2. Topics — the 4 topics that are recommended to deepen are: a) Sex b) Death c) God d) Possessions
Question should be "specific" to GET SPECIFIC FEELINGS.
3. Depth — We should stay on a topic until we can go no further. Tomorrow's question should come from tonight's dialog. *(Reprinted from Joliet "IN-JOY")*

Feeling Words

alienated
distant
close
superior
manipulated
dependent
independent
hateful
compulsive
serene
peaceful
evasive
agitated
embarrassed
hostile
threatened
cooperative
repressed
overwhelmed
withdrawn
assertive
repulsed
aggressive
disgusted
self-assured
positive
anxious
seductive

repressed
open
sexy
happy
cool
sad
put-down
fearful
guilty
mad
angry
harrried
panicky
pressured
grief-stricken
frantic
calm
confident
irritable
timid
hypocritical
dishonest
warm
crazy
annoyed
nauseated
terrified
insecure

nervous
sweaty
infatuated
starry-eyed
choked-up
itchy
impatient
restless
chilled
terrorized
irritated
excited
touchy
breathless
hurt
belligerent
judgmental
gentle
soft
relaxed
emotionless
empty
cold
calculating
determined
defiant
disgust
surprised

horrified
ecstatic
joyful
integrated
coming unglued
depressed
immobilized
anaesthesized
paralyzed
uptight
locked up
tense
whiney
stretched
turned on
taut
bushed
exhausted
strong
affectionate
fond
light
airy
breezy
grateful
compassionate
lovely
pleased

spineless
touched
proud
humble
alarmed
threatened
comforted
spontaneous
enthusiastic
honest
trusting
hopeful
profound
loving
tolerant
open
beaten
burdened
cold
hot
frigid
weepy
resentful
envious
confused
respectful
powerful
powerless

hopeless
impotent
inadequate
impatient
played out
bored
ashamed
frustrated
excited
tender
lonely
sexual
afraid
guilty
silly
giddy
sunshiny
comfortable
thrilled
peaceful
sorry
bewildered
contented
estranged
gutless
torn
mixed up
cautious