

Expressing Feelings

Talking about your feelings can be challenging for a variety of reasons. For many people, talking about emotions was ignored or discouraged during their upbringing. However, there are major benefits to talking about your feelings, especially within the privacy of therapy. This worksheet aims to help you think through barriers and benefits to talking about your feelings, help you identify how you're feeling, and show you ways to practice talking about your feelings.

Barriers to talking about your feelings

Many of us have had real past experiences that taught us lessons about why it's risky to talk about emotions.

People like me can't talk about their feelings.

- Whether it's because of gender, culture, race/ethnicity, age, or anything else around identity, many people have heard messages that they can't talk about or experience certain emotions. Messages like, "Boys don't cry" or, "In my generation, we don't talk about that" can make it difficult or risky to talk about or show particular feelings.

Feelings are irrational and distract from solving the real problem at hand.

- Many of us have heard, "You're being irrational" when we show or express our feelings. We've heard messages that seem to say we cannot be taken seriously or make good decisions if we are feeling an emotion.

If I talk about my feelings, something bad will happen, or it won't help.

- Sometimes, people who have heard our feelings have ignored us, rejected us, or hurt us for expressing them.

Write about a time in the past when it was difficult or risky to express your feelings. What happened?

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Expressing Feelings

What barriers get in the way of expressing your emotions in your everyday life?

Benefits to talking about your feelings

Acknowledging, identifying, and talking about our emotions helps us learn important information and supports our mental health.

Emotions give us important information.

- In our brains, the emotional center (limbic system) scans our environment and gets us ready to act. When the limbic system senses danger, we feel fear and are filled with energy to fight or flee. But our limbic system signals us for other reasons, too - when it perceives a loss, a boundary has been crossed, that we may be judged, etc.
- Emotions are not always 100% “correct.” For example, you might *feel like* you have to flee from danger when in reality, you have to stand up and give a presentation in front of others. But emotions do signal us that something is important (for example, the success of the presentation could affect your promotion) and directs our attention and energy towards it (for example, thinking about the presentation often).

Expressing emotions supports our mental health.

- Research shows that just labelling our emotions alone can help our minds and bodies feel more calm.
- Expressing emotions (by talking or writing about them) helps reduce stress, especially when stressors are not controllable.

How could you benefit from expressing your emotions?

*This worksheet provides information but is not a substitute for therapy. It works best with guidance from a professional.



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Even if it's been risky in the past, there are safe places to practice expressing emotion.

- Therapists and counselors are *required* to keep your information private, including what you say about your feelings.** They are also trained to help you identify your emotions and understand where they are coming from.
- Group therapy, support groups, and listening services are all created to understand and encourage people when they talk about their feelings.
- Religious or spiritual leaders often offer emotional support to those they serve.
- Trusted family and friends can provide a variety of supports, like validation, cheering you up, and helping you problem-solve.

Who could you express your emotions to?

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Figuring out how you're feeling

Sometimes it's hard to even decide how you're feeling, and that can prevent expressing your emotions. If you don't know what you're feeling, here are a few ideas:

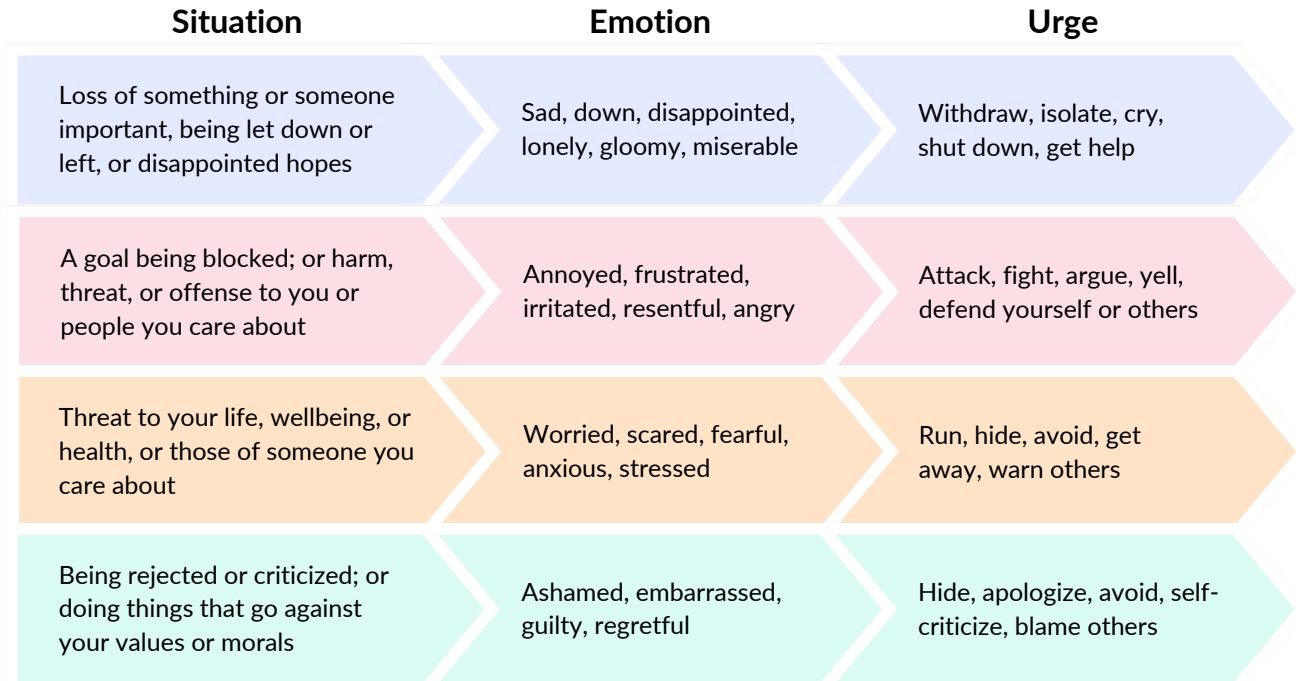
- Take a look at the **Emotion** column on the next page. Do any of those emotions seem like the right fit? If none of them are quite right, try looking at a larger [emotion list](#).
- You might not know what your emotion is yet, but try starting with the **Situation** column. For many people, certain types of situations (like losses) often result in a related feeling (like sadness). If your situation matches one below, take a look at the related feelings to the right and consider if they are the right fit.
- Emotions get our bodies and minds ready to act in ways to meet our needs. If you are not sure of what your emotion is, but you know what you feel like *doing*, take a look at the **Urge** column. Urges (like isolating) are often the result of an emotion (like sadness), so if your urge matches one below, look at the related feelings to the left.

**Therapists and counselors do need to break confidentiality when required by law if there is a serious safety risk.

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Which idea(s) did you try? Did they work for you? Why or why not?

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Name your feeling(s) here, even if you have to guess. Practice will help you name your feelings in the future.

Practicing talking about your feelings

To practice talking about your feelings, take a moment to remember a time you had strong emotions, or try these exercises the next time you feel a strong emotion.

1) Write down the situation, emotion, and urge.

Situation	Emotion	Urge

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2) Talk about your feelings, just to yourself. If you're not sure what to say, you can follow the process above and try saying something like, "When [situation] happened, I felt [emotion], and I wanted to [urge]." You can also practice by writing a note to yourself, or recording yourself speaking aloud and listening back to the recording. In the space below, write about what you tried and how it went.

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3) Imagine expressing your feelings to someone patient, understanding, and respectful to you. What do you imagine this would be like? How would this feel? What would they say back?

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4) Practice with someone you trust. Here are a few ideas for how you might practice expressing your feelings:

- The next time someone asks how you are, try taking the opportunity to express a mild feeling, and resist the urge to just say something like, "fine," "good," or "okay."
 - For example, "I'm a little frustrated with [situation]," or, "I'm excited about [something]"
- Add "I felt." The next time you're talking to someone you trust about something, try adding just one sentence about how you felt.
 - For example, "My boss asked to meet one-on-one yesterday. I felt kind of nervous, but it turned out fine."
 - Or, "Did you see the game? I felt so frustrated at halftime."
- Ask them how they feel, and pay attention. What words did they choose? Why did they feel the way they did?
- If you can, let someone know you're working on this skill. Telling someone you trust can help you stay accountable, and they can prompt you to talk about your feelings.

5) Keep trying. Like any other skill, you can get better at talking about your feelings with practice.

You can do it!

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Additional Resources to Support Your Mental Health Journey

It can be hard to know where to begin looking for support in your mental health journey. Getting a referral from a primary care physician is a reliable first step. Also, sometimes family and friends have experienced similar issues and have professionals they would recommend. The experts at ChoosingTherapy.com are here to help as well, with resources we have reviewed and recommend. Our [strict editorial standards](#) ensure our reviews are fair, honest, thorough, and based on firsthand experience.

You Can Trust ChoosingTherapy.com



325+
Companies Reviewed



3,625+
Hours of Firsthand Experience



1,545+
Data Points Analyzed



[Best Online Therapy](#)

Online therapy is a convenient way to connect with a licensed therapist to address mental health issues, reduce unhealthy behaviors, develop effective coping skills, and get more satisfaction out of life. Many companies accept insurance and most have next-day appointments available.

[Best Online Psychiatry](#)

Online psychiatry providers enable patients to consult with licensed psychiatrists and other mental health professionals. They can evaluate, diagnose, and prescribe medication to help manage mental health issues. Many companies accept insurance and most have next-day appointments available.



[Best Mental Health Apps](#)

Apps can be great way to monitor mood, track sleep, journal, and practice healthy coping skills like mindfulness and meditation. There are apps specifically designed to help people reduce the symptoms of depression, anxiety, ADHD, chronic stress, and burnout.

[Therapist Directory](#)

When you're looking for a mental health provider with a very particular skill set, level of experience, or personality type, a therapist directory can be very helpful. Using the filters, you can refine your search until you find a therapist who feels like a perfect fit.

