

# Managing Emotions

**Objectives:** To realise the importance of acknowledging and expressing emotions.  
To learn skills for identifying and managing emotions more effectively – both ours and other people's.

**Session Times:** 3 hours: Sections A–F  
2 hours: Sections A, C, E and F  
1 ½ hours: Sections A–C  
½ hour: Sections B and F

**Recommended Background:** The Win/Win Approach  
Empathy (including Active Listening)  
Willingness to Resolve

**Section:** A. Identifying Emotions and their Effects 6.3  
B. Expressing Our Emotions 6.5  
C. Handling Our Own Anger 6.8  
D. Managing Our Emotions 6.8  
E. Handling Difficult Emotions in Others 6.9  
F. Concluding Discussion 6.10

**Activities:** Exploring Our Emotional Responses to Conflict A.6.1  
Focusing A.6.3  
Handling Another Person's Inflammation A.6.6



<b>Handouts:</b>	Section A:	How Do You Feel Today?	H.6.1
		Accepting Our Emotions	H.6.2
	Section B:	Cycle of Emotion	H.6.3
	Section C:	Handling Your Own Anger	H.6.4
	Section D:	Exploring Our Response to Conflict	H.6.5
		Focusing on Conflict	H.6.6
	Section E:	Handling Difficult Emotions in Others	H.6.7



# Managing Emotions

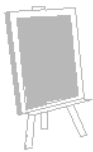
**Don't indulge! Don't deny!  
Create richer relationships!**

## A. Identifying Emotions and their Effects

(30 minutes)

**Question:** Think of a recent conflict. What emotion(s) did you feel?

**Discussion:** Ask participants to jot down their answers. Then write them on the board and use the following questions to stimulate a short discussion.



**Question:** In what part of your body do you experience these emotions?

**Discussion:** Draw out participants' responses. In addition, you might consider.

- "butterflies" and churning in the stomach
- stiffness: tight muscles and tension in neck, shoulders, jaw, chest
- headache.

**Question:** What effect do emotions have on the progress and outcome of a conflict?

**Discussion:** Draw out participants' responses. In addition, you might explore:

- may impede it, cause attention to shift from the issue to the emotion
- inhibits listening and expression of concerns
- leads to suppression and avoidance of the issue because it's too uncomfortable.

**Question:** Are there times when emotions are overwhelming? What happens then?

**Discussion:** Draw out participants' responses. In addition, you might consider:

- Emotions take over.
- It may result in screaming, crying, physical and verbal violence.
- There is complete avoidance because of fear of repeating the scene.



**Question:**

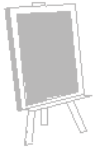
**Are there some emotions which are more significant than others with regard to conflict? Which are they?**

*From this discussion, you may like to consider more deeply one, or even a few, emotions which are difficult for people to manage. Encourage comments from participants and give additional information when needed. If time is limited, concentrate on anger as this is the emotion which most frequently causes people difficulty.*

- **Anger:** When appropriately expressed, anger can be a fire for change. Only when it's misdirected, or inappropriately expressed, is it destructive. Recognising and accepting our own anger will provide the impetus for change. Off-loading it onto others, making "them the bad guys", gives away our personal power and often leaves us stuck with the problem.
- **Resentment:** This is like frozen anger and is a feeling that blames others for a situation or for a hurt we feel. It's an "export job" – a way of holding others apart from us, to maintain a position of being right, superior or self-righteous. It's often easier to feel resentment rather than to take responsibility for other feelings, or for changing the situation.
- **Hurt:** Underneath resentment and anger there is often hurt. Acknowledging that you feel hurt is empowering. The alternatives are often to withdraw, to seek revenge or to feel resentment. All of these contribute to the escalation of conflict. Often it is easier for others to acknowledge our hurt than our anger. When talking about our anger, we may be better received if we also talk about our hurt.
- **Guilt:** Guilt can be very self-destructive when we allow it to gnaw away at us. It can be productive when we allow ourselves to feel it fully, and then move on by seeking to understand the source of our guilt. It is then that we can choose what needs to be done to resolve it. All we may be able to do is decide not to do what we did again, in a similar situation. Or we may be able to learn a new way of behaving.
- **Regret:** Often when we show anger or resentment, we are also hiding regret. We have great difficulty in experiencing and expressing the pain and sorrow under the anger and resentment. Fear, anxiety and embarrassment block the expression of regret. Regret is a huge feeling that is the acknowledgement of the unfulfilled potential of a situation. It is often the last emotion before we let go of the "if only's" and reach a place of acceptance.
- **Fear:** We often experience this when we feel out of control of a situation. Fear arises from our interpretation of what the outcome will be: physical or emotional hurt, or consequences that will diminish us or our circumstances in some way. Here are two useful acronyms:



Write on the board:



**Fantasy  
Experienced  
As  
Reality**

and

**False  
Evidence  
Appearing  
Real**

Separating the interpretation from the reality, and becoming centred within ourselves will allow us to choose appropriate action. Fear warns us that we feel out of control and need to proceed with caution and perhaps get some help or gather more information.

*Give out handouts: "How do You Feel Today?" and "Accepting Our Emotions".*

## B. Expressing Our Emotions

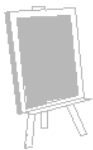
(30 minutes)

**Question:** What are some of the ways we express or deal with our emotions? You might like to think of one-off and on-going ways.

**Discussion:** *Clarity the difference between long term and short term.*

One-off or short term techniques are useful when we're unable to deal completely with the emotion at the time e.g. in a meeting, at a social function, or other setting where it's inappropriate. On-going or long term techniques are those which we build into our daily lives to release tension.

*Write participants' ideas on the board. You might want to add some of the following examples:*



### **one-off**

breathe deeply  
take time out  
doodle  
stamp your foot  
snap a pencil  
tear up a piece of paper  
have a cup of tea

### **on-going,**

exercise  
talk  
listen  
meditate  
cuddle  
write a journal

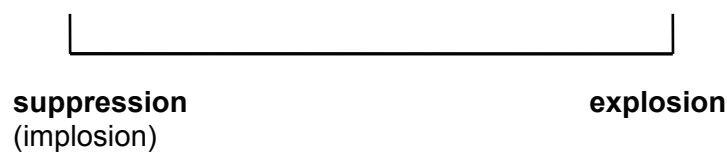
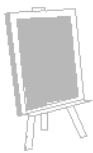


**Question:** What happens if we don't express our emotions?

**Discussion:** Draw out participants' responses. In addition, you might consider:

- ill health
- stress
- withdrawal
- explosion
- diminished capacity to experience pleasure and happiness.

*At an appropriate point in the discussion, draw a line on the board showing suppression (i.e. not expressing) as part of a continuum resulting in explosion.*



Explosion is usually unproductive and often misdirected. A small incident can often be a trigger for discharging suppressed feelings. We may dump these feelings inappropriately, for example, on a shop assistant processing a sale more slowly than we would like.

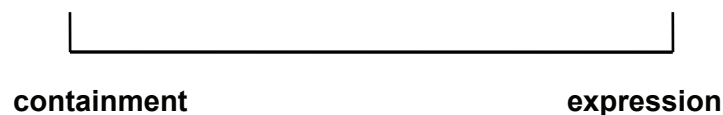
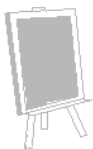
**Question:** What prevents us from expressing our emotions?

**Discussion:** Draw out participants' responses. In addition, you might consider:

- cultural expectations
- family background
- workplace and social decorum
- self-image

**Question:** Does this mean that we often have no alternative than to suppress, or is there another option?

**Discussion:** Draw out participants' ideas. When appropriate, draw another line, in a different colour, under the first line. (See above.)



**Question:** How do "suppressing" and "containing" feel different? How are their consequences different?

**Suppressing:**

- feels tense, stressful, with breathing often very shallow
- leads to avoidance of conflict, constant stress and possibly ill health
- is fearful of the emotion, and tries to sidestep it.

**Containing:**

- is releasing some tension through acknowledging the feeling and putting it on temporary hold
- is breathing deeply
- leads to confidence to deal with conflict, less stress, empowerment and better health
- is holding the emotion, feeling it and choosing not to make it public.

**Question:** What about differences between "expressing" and "exploding", in feelings and consequences?

**Exploding:**

- feels like losing control
- may result in residual tension from guilt
- may lead to damaged relationships.

**Expressing:**

- is letting go, cathartic
- leads to feelings of relief and completion
- is a component of the constructive resolution of conflict.

*Give out **handout: "The Cycle of Emotion"**, drawing participants' attention to the process whereby emotions are acknowledged, and managed effectively to reach resolution. Contrast this with less effective management resulting in incomplete resolution.*



## C. Handling Our Own Anger

(20 minutes)

Because anger is such a passionate and powerful emotion, it is one that often overwhelms us. It also is one that often leads to explosion unless we learn to handle it productively.

*Give out **handout: "Handling Your Own Anger"**.*

*Work through each point, encouraging participants to comment or expand on the ideas. Ask participants to complete the question: "In what part of your body do you notice tension when angry?" Then encourage them to share their responses with a partner.*

*Allow 3 minutes.*

*In the same way, move on to the last two points on the page. Ask participants to complete the boxes on on-going and one-off tension release techniques, and then share their responses with a partner.*

*Allow a further 3 minutes.*

*Encourage participants to make comments or ask questions in the large group.*

Learning to handle our anger in appropriate ways

- frees us to deal more constructively with conflict
- helps us to avoid a build up of tension in our lives, which can lead to an inability to function effectively.

## D. Managing Our Emotions

(40–45 minutes)

*Below are two approaches for exploring our emotional responses to conflict. Choose to do one or more of these, if there is sufficient time and if appropriate to the group. (See also Part IV: Aikido and Part V: Bioenergetics.)*

**Exploring Our Emotional Responses to Conflict:** *working in pairs and using a set of questions, participants reflect on and explore their emotional responses to conflict. (See Managing Emotions Activities, p A.6.1.)* (45 minutes)

**Focusing:** *working in pairs, participants learn a through-the-body approach to unravelling a problem to which there are difficult emotions. (See Managing Emotions Activities, p A.6.3.)* (40 minutes)





## E. Handling Difficult Emotions in Others

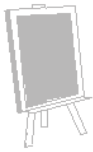
(40 minutes)

For more information see p 134–139, Helena Cornelius and Shoshana Faire, **Everyone Can Win** 2nd edition. (Sydney: Simon & Schuster (Australia) P/L, 2006.)

Review the emotions identified in Section A which are sometimes difficult for people to handle, or focus your attention entirely on anger, as this is often the emotion in others with which we have most difficulty.

**Question:** What do you feel, and what do you do when confronted with difficult emotions in others?

**Discussion:** Draw out participants' responses. Write them on the board under two headings:



**What we feel**

**What we do**

**Question:** How productive are these reactions?

**Discussion:** Stimulate discussion with further questions:

Do these reactions inflame the situation?

Do they help to resolve it?

Are there later consequences? (e.g. feelings of distress, tiredness, powerlessness)

**Question:** Now, think of a difficult emotional behaviour in others which you've had some success in handling. What did you do?

Ask participants to write down their answers.

**Group Activity:** **Handling Difficult Emotions in Others:** working in small groups of five or six, participants share with each other the successful strategies they've used to handle difficult emotions. (See below for details.)  
(20 minutes)

Divide the large group into small groups of five or six.

In your small groups, share strategies that you have found successful in dealing with difficult emotions in others. You may be able to think of specific examples. There may have been several steps in the strategies you used. Try to identify them, and make a note of them.

Allow 15 minutes.

Then ask the small groups to consider the following question.

**Question:** Are there any common patterns in these successful strategies?



**Discussion:** *Allow a further 10 minutes in small group discussion, and then form again into the large group.*

**Discussion:** *Ask for examples of the strategies participants used. Explore these strategies to identify the following components:*

- managing own reaction (not becoming inflamed, defensive etc.)
- active listening for feelings and facts
- making "I" Statements
- focusing on the issue, not the person
- asking clarifying and reframing open-ended questions
- rewarding behaviour you want
- negotiating a solution that takes account of both your and their needs
- expressing support and reassurance.

*Give out the **handout: "Handling Difficult Emotions in Others".***

**Group Activity:** ***Handling Another Person's Inflammation:** a role play in which participants practise these active listening skills. (See *Managing Emotions Activities*, p A.6.6.) (20 minutes)*

## **F. Concluding Discussion**

**(10 minutes)**

We experience emotions in our bodies and in our minds, so we need to deal with them in a variety of ways. We can have a felt sense of them, we can analyse, we can explore, we can centre our energy.

We need to accept our emotions, not deny them or indulge them. We just need to know that they exist, and to use them to build richer relationships.

It is valuable to look for the core of our emotional response, to focus.

We need ways of safely releasing and appropriately expressing our emotions for our well-being and the well-being of our relationships.

We need to practise ways of handling difficult emotions in others:

- active listening
- giving support and reassurance
- selecting out what is valid from emotional dumping
- re-directing statements that create or inflame conflict towards positive possibilities in the situation.



# Managing Emotions Activities

## Exploring Our Emotional Responses to Conflict

### Trainers' Information Only

<b>Context:</b>	Often people don't find time to reflect on their emotional responses to a conflict. This can result in stress and the inability to resolve the situation. (See <i>Chapter 5, Managing Emotions: Section D.</i> )
<b>Time:</b>	20–50 minutes
<b>Aims:</b>	To reflect on feelings in a current conflict situation To identify possible action to help resolve the conflict, and to move on.
<b>Handout:</b>	<b><i>"Exploring Our Response to Conflict"</i></b>

**Instructions:** *Ask participants to think about a recent conflict. Say to the group:*

*What were the emotions you experienced? Can you sense those feelings now?*

*Ask participants to jot down their responses, or just to sit quietly and re-live them. They may expand on the conflict and emotions they identified in *Managing Emotions: Section A* or think of another.*

*Give out the **handout: "Exploring Our Response to Conflict"**.*

*Expand on each of the five questions. (See **Everyone Can Win**, 2nd edition, p131–132.)*

*If time is very limited, then you could also discuss the goals now and recommend that participants work through the entire page themselves at another time.*

*Preferably, divide the group into pairs with Partners A and B.*

### Round 1

During the next few minutes we will each have the opportunity, using the questions on the handout, to focus on our feelings in a current conflict situation.

In each pair, one will be the speaker and the other the listener. Later, we'll reverse roles.



Partners A, you start by giving a brief account of the conflict and then talk your way through each of the questions, delving as deeply as you can and are willing, to understand your own feelings and responses. Some questions may be more relevant than others so attend to each of them as much or as little as is appropriate.

Partners B, you give your attention to the speakers as completely as you can. Help them focus their own thoughts by active listening, by summarising what they say and by asking clarifying questions.

Work with the five questions only. We'll deal with the five goals separately. Take your time to do this – you have about 15 minutes. Don't reverse roles.

*Then draw the group's attention to the five goals to pursue when communicating emotions. Relate these goals back to the need to express emotions appropriately. (Managing Emotions: Section B.) Expand on each of the goals. (See **Everyone Can Win**, 2nd edition p133.) Allow another 5 minutes for the same speakers to explore where they go next.*

## Round 2

Partners A and B reverse roles. Partner B becomes the speaker, Partner A becomes the listener.

*Allow a further 20 minutes.*

## Debriefing:

This can be a very emotional exercise for some people, so it can be helpful to schedule it to finish just before a break, and not just before the end of a session.

What was significant in that process for you?

For many of you, some significant feelings might have been aroused. What could you do to deal with these feelings? *(After participants have responded, you might add: centre, write down thoughts and feelings, talk with another person, give ourselves some time and space to further reflect.)*



# Managing Emotions Activities

## Focusing

### Trainers' Information Only

<b>Context:</b>	The best way of dealing with a difficult emotion is to feel and explore its depths. The art of focusing is a through-the-body method of unravelling a problem. (See <i>Chapter 5: Managing Emotions: Section D.</i> )
<b>Time:</b>	40 minutes
<b>Aims:</b>	To learn the art of focusing, of becoming aware of a felt sense of emotions  To experience the release of energy, known as body shift when you remember or label accurately for the first time something that is hard to bring to your conscious mind.
<b>Handout:</b>	<b><i>"Focusing on Conflict"</i></b>

**Instructions:** We're going to learn a technique that enables us to experience our entire response to a particular situation. It is very helpful when you are trying to contain emotions rather than suppress them. (See *Chapter 5. Managing Emotions: Section B.*)

Conflict is not only a mental experience, it's a physical one. It encompasses everything you know and feel about a problem at a given time. It communicates itself to you all at once rather than detail by detail.

As a lead to understanding this, put both your hands out in front of you and close your eyes. In one hand, imagine you're holding an orange. Sense what it feels like – its texture, its weight, its size. (*Pause*) In your other hand, imagine you're holding a tennis ball. Immediately, you'll have a sense that it's different to the orange. Feel those differences. (*Pause*)

Now, with your eyes still closed, let go of the orange and the ball.

Drop your hands.

This time, sense your mother. Don't go into details. Just tune into yourself and into the general sense of "all about your mother". Feel your awareness of your mother in your whole body. (*Pause*) Now, sense "all about your father". (*Pause*)

Notice the difference. (*Pause*)

*Ask people to open their eyes.*



This felt sense is often difficult to label. It's large, complicated and even fuzzy, and may be unclear until you focus on it.

Focusing is a way of unravelling the many emotional threads that make up your response to a person, a situation, a conflict. It includes the emotion, and it is more than the emotion. It's a way of peeling back the layers to reach and label the core of your response. Usually that response is felt not in arms, legs or head but in the core of the body – somewhere from the chest to the belly. When you're learning to focus, it's good to find a time and place where you can be comfortable and undisturbed. We're going to try it now.

*Ask the group to sit in pairs facing each other. You could quietly play some soft background music. Use a gentle tone of voice to encourage reflection.*

Close your eyes and think of a significant conflict or problem you are presently facing in your life. Feel all about this conflict – don't go into it, just sense it. *(Pause a minute or so.)*

If you can, find where in your body you feel its tension. Stay with that feeling. What is the main thing in it? Don't answer... listen, rather than tell yourself. Let words or images come up out of this feeling. *(Pause another minute.)*

Go back and forth between words and the feeling. Look for a word or several words to accurately label the feeling. *(Pause another minute.)*

When you make an accurate match, let yourself feel it for a minute. *(Pause a minute.)*

When you're ready, open your eyes and wait for a moment.

*When everyone has opened their eyes, continue:*

Choose who will go first. Try telling your partner something about that experience. Were there any changes in feeling and in the words you used? Was there any sense of completion or of relief? Don't give them the history or details, stay with where you are right now. Listeners, encourage speakers to continue focusing while they are telling you, by checking back with them that their descriptions are the right words for the felt sense they now have. Don't let this time be idle chatter. It should continue to be reflective. After accurately describing a felt sense, something lets go, and often in a short space of time the felt sense shifts and takes on a new perspective, which now waits to be accurately named.

The person listening can encourage that sharing by asking focusing questions: What do you mean by that? Is there something under that? Is that all, or is there more? The real essence of active listening (as covered in the Empathy section) is to help the other person to focus.

*Allow 5–10 minutes for each person's turn.*



**Discussion:** Encourage participants to share anything significant for them in that process.

Did you notice any changes?

Did you feel any sense of emotional release or relief?

*Conclude this segment by talking about **body shift**.*

Have you ever walked out of the house and known that you've forgotten something, but you can't remember what it is? There is a tension while you search to bring the forgotten object to consciousness. Un-named, unconscious processes during conflict hold the same sort of tension.

When you accurately label a problem, bringing it to consciousness, you will often feel a sense of sudden physical release, a letting go. You feel it right through you. It feels like exhaling after holding your breath, like something somewhere in your body has unknotted or become unstuck.

You might shift in your seat, sigh, loosen some facial tension, or more comfortably relax your shoulders, your neck or your overall posture. When this body shift occurs, you know that you've correctly labelled your feeling. Then you have the power to change and to move towards a more successful way of living.

*Refer participants to the books **Everyone Can Win**, 2nd edition p 125–129 and Eugene Gendlin, **Focusing** (New York: Bantam, 1981) for more information.*

*Give out the **handout: "Focusing on Conflict"**.*



# Managing Emotions Activities

## Handling Another Person's Inflammation

### Trainers' Information Only

<b>Context:</b>	People can often do well with a win/win approach when everyone is calm, but when emotions are high and the other person is accusing, people frequently react rather than respond. (See <i>Chapter 5: Managing Emotions, Section E.</i> )
<b>Time:</b>	20 minutes
<b>Aim:</b>	To practice appropriate ways of responding when under pressure.
<b>Handout:</b>	<b><i>"Handling Difficult Emotions in Others"</i></b>

**Instructions:** We're going to practise handling another person's inflamed behaviour by doing a role play in pairs. We'll refer to the points on the **handout: "Handling Difficult Emotions in Others"**.

*Remind participants of the main steps in responding to inflammation.*

**Receive** – really listen. Try not to become defensive.

**Notice** – check your feelings. How are you feeling? Acknowledge this to yourself.

**Centre** – breathe. Remember to breathe deeply. When you block your breathing, you block your responsiveness. Try to be centred.

**Listen again** – re-focus on the other person. Use your active listening skills to respond to the person's needs.

*Divide the group into pairs: A is inflamed, B responds.*

*Pairs can either think of a relevant situation themselves, or use the following situation:*

### Sample Situation:

There are two neighbours: A and B. Neighbour B has parked a car partially over the driveway and has done it a number of times previously. Neighbour A could drive a car out, but with difficulty.

Neighbour A is inflamed and says something like this: "This is the third time you've parked your car across my driveway. I'm fed up. You're inconsiderate. I hate living next to you. You leave your garbage bin out for three days. Your dog deposits on my lawn etc."





### **Extra instructions for Neighbour A – the inflamed person.**

Work with your partner to provide them with an opportunity to practise the skill. If Neighbour B replies non-defensively and in a way that makes you feel you have been heard, tone down your anger and give a slightly less angry second attack so that Neighbour B can have another go. If the response would have inflamed you more, increase the anger in your next statements. Include a clue as to why the response has further inflamed you e.g. "You're not hearing what I'm saying". You're not taking me seriously."

### **Extra instructions for Neighbour B – the responder.**

Bring up your tone of voice balancing it between your own mood and that of Neighbour A. A lighter version of some of Neighbour A's gestures or facial expressions might naturally go along with this.

The purpose is to communicate rapport, not to compete, defend or attack. It is to communicate a willingness to respond close to Neighbour A's level of intensity about the issue. As the level of intensity of Neighbour A's attack drops, make sure you drop yours too. It should probably always be a little lower than Neighbour A's, so that there is a gradual soothing effect. You will want to soothe the person as well as remaining attentive.

*Allow 3 minutes for the role play. Then ask partners to spend 2 minutes sharing how they felt, what was working, what was difficult and so on. Reverse roles and repeat.*

- Discussion:**
- How did you feel when you were under attack?
  - How difficult was it to refrain from arguing with the person?
  - What were the difficulties in active listening?
  - When you were inflamed, what particularly helped to calm you?
  - Was there anything said or done which further inflamed you?

### **Important Points to Cover:**

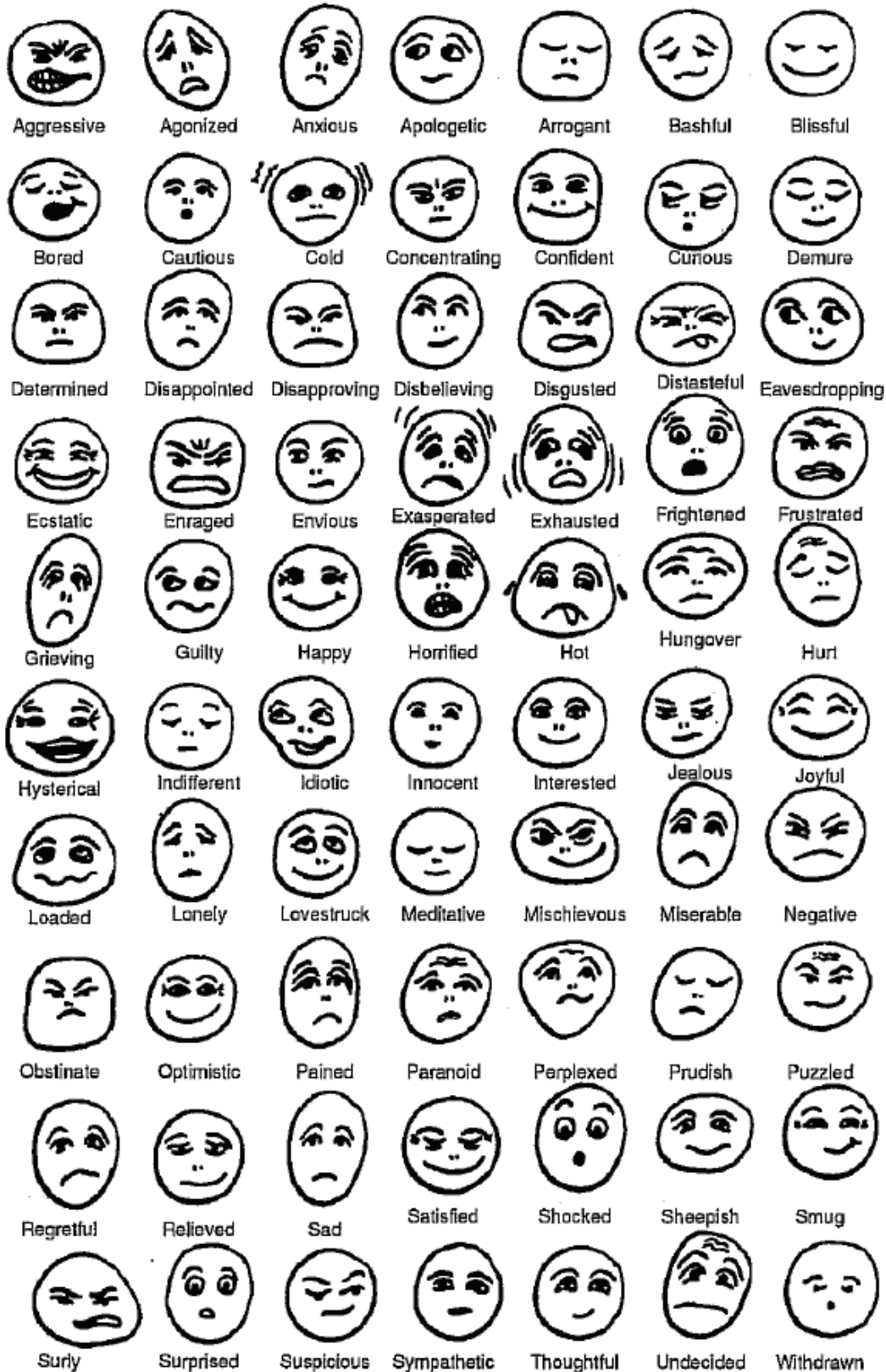
When people are inflamed and there is high emotion, they are often less controlled and cannot think logically. So it's impossible to have a satisfactory conversation when there is high emotion and, therefore, much more difficult to develop options.

Your purpose is to assist such people to reduce their level of emotion so they can think more logically and move towards win/win outcomes.

Over-controlled, super-calm active listening statements used when the other person is very angry, sound fake and, indeed, often are. They will probably irritate the person further. Show some intensity, but respond rather than react.



# How Do You Feel Today?



# Accepting Our Emotions

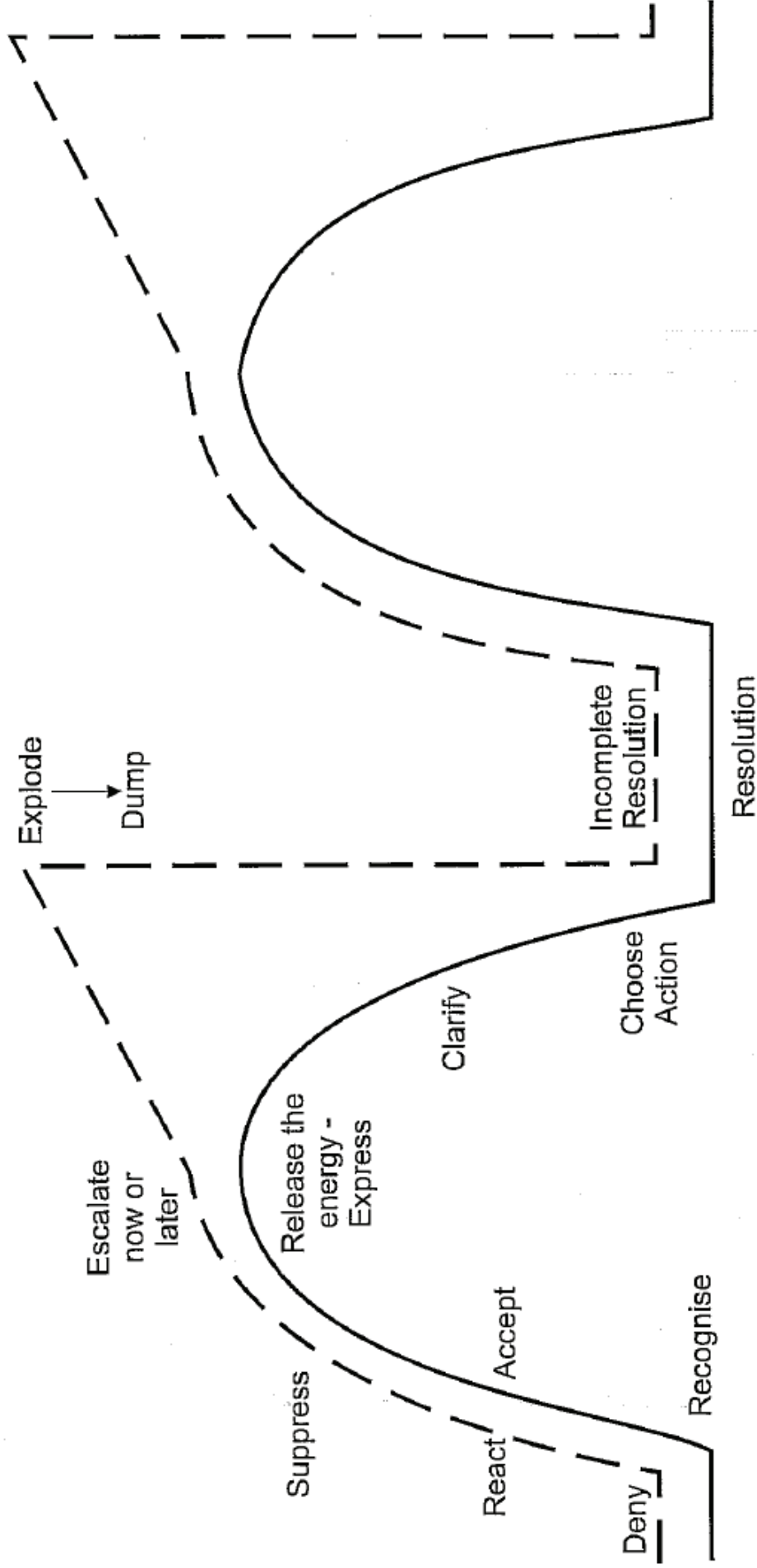
All emotions are acceptable and valuable. There is no emotion we should not feel. They are all part of what it is to be a human being. The challenge is to find appropriate ways of expressing them.

## EMOTIONS THAT ARE SOMETIMES DIFFICULT FOR US TO HANDLE

- Anger:** When mobilised and appropriately expressed, anger is a fire for change and a way of letting others know their behaviour is unacceptable to us. Look for the hurt that is sometimes underneath.  
*"I need change. I need to communicate this."*
- Resentment:** Resentment is an export job, blaming others for how we feel or for the situation we're in.  
*It is immobilised anger. Look for what could help it to shift.*  
*"I need to take responsibility for how I really feel and to change this situation."*
- Hurt:** Hurt tells us that our needs are not being met, or that our self-esteem has been wounded. Often it deepens our relationship if we can communicate our hurt without resentment.  
*"I need to be close. I need to be healed."*
- Fear:** Fear warns us that we need to proceed with caution, to seek help, to get more information, and to separate fantasy from reality.  
*"I need to take care. I need help."*
- Guilt:** Guilt comes about when we act or feel something different to what we expected of ourselves. It indicates there is the possibility for a better response.  
*"I need to make amends or do things differently next time."*
- Regret:** Regret is a huge feeling that can encompass pain and sorrow. It is the acknowledgement of the unfulfilled potential of a situation. It is often the last emotion before we let go of the "if only" and reach a place of acceptance.  
*"I need to acknowledge my pain and accept it without denial. "*



# Cycle of Emotion



\_\_\_\_\_ effective management of emotions  
 ----- less effective management of emotions

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# Handling Your Own Anger

- When anger is experienced, adrenalin is released into the body. Blood rushes to our legs, arms, and head; we begin to sweat and to breathe quickly. Our heartbeat speeds up; we may have a strong urge to yell, scream, kick, hit or run. We tend to react by fight or flight.
- Anger is either physically released at the time it is experienced, or it is suppressed. Since it is rarely appropriate to release anger physically for fear of damaging relationships or causing bodily harm, it is often suppressed.
- If not released at the time it is experienced, anger gets stored in our bodies as muscular tension. The particular part of the body affected varies considerably from person to person.

In what part of your body do you notice tension when you are angry?

- If this tension is not released, one of two things may happen. It may build up until it can no longer be suppressed, and we explode at (or "dump" on) someone who may have had nothing to do with the original anger. It may remain unreleased and, over a period of many years, cause chronic muscular holding patterns and possibly damage to our immune system.
- When deciding on a way to release our anger which is right for us, we need to remember that the tension is best released in a manner consistent with the intensity of the emotion. (e.g. when we feel like hitting someone, swimming may be more appropriate than meditating.) Many people prefer regular on-going activities which prevent the excessive build-up of day-to-day tensions in the first place. As well, most of us will use some techniques for releasing tension on occasions after a particularly strong experience of anger or frustration or upset.

On-going Tension Release Techniques

One-off Tension Release Techniques



# Exploring Our Response to Conflict

## Five questions – Five Goals

**Don't indulge! Don't deny!  
Create richer relationships!**

### FIVE QUESTIONS

**When angry / hurt / frightened:**

Why am I feeling so angry / hurt / frightened? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What do I want to change? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What do I need in order to let go of this feeling? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Whose problem is this, really? How much is mine? How much is the other person's? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What is the "message" I infer from the situation? (e.g. he doesn't like me, she doesn't respect me.) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### FIVE GOALS

**in communicating emotions:**

- Aim: to avoid the desire to punish or blame  
To improve the situation  
To communicate my feelings appropriately  
To improve the relationship and increase communication  
To avoid repeating the same situation

What could I say? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

If communicating my emotions is not appropriate, what other action can I take?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



# ***Focusing on Conflict***

- 1. Preparing:** Find a time and place to sit undisturbed and comfortable. Possibly close your eyes.
- 2. Clearing a space:** Let anything which is disturbing you, which makes you feel less than perfectly fine, come into your thoughts. Don't go into anything. Just greet each thing that comes, and breathe deeply.
- 3. Feeling for the problem:** Pick the problem you would most like to focus on right now. Don't go into it. Get a **felt sense** of it: feel "all about the problem" as a whole.
- 4. Finding the crux:** Stay with that feeling. What is the main thing in it? Don't answer, let whatever comes come. LISTEN, rather than tell yourself. WAIT, let words or images come out of this feeling.
- 5. Labelling:** Go back and forth between words or images, and the feeling. Try to get them to match – if the feeling changes, follow it, continuing to label the new feeling.
- 6. Checking back with the feeling:** Check it. Ask your body "Is this label or description exactly right, or not quite?" When you get a perfect match, the words being just right for this feeling, let yourself feel that for a moment. Once some aspect of the problem is accurately labelled, you may experience a **body shift** – a sense of sudden or gradual physical relief.
- 7. Another round starting from 3:** Often this opens up the possibility of going deeper into some other aspects of the difficulty.

*See Eugene Gendlin, **Focusing** (US: Bantam, 1981).*



# ***Handling Difficult Emotions in Others***

If we react to others defensively by attacking or withdrawing, conflict often increases. If, instead, we respond appropriately, we can help to bring the emotions to a level at which the issue can be dealt with more constructively.

*Try the following:*

## ***Receive***

Listen and say nothing for the moment. Don't try to tone them down, defend or explain yourself yet.  
Give the other person room to discharge their pent-up emotions.  
Respect the other person's communication of feelings.

## ***Notice***

Observe your own reaction.

## ***Centre***

Tune into yourself. Breathe deeply.

## ***Listen again***

Ask yourself what you are picking up from the communication. Separate feelings from content. Strain out what is valid and if you can, let some irate remarks pass you by without reacting.

## ***Reflect back***

Reflect both feelings and content.  
"Let me check with you if..."  
"Is that what you are saying...?"

## ***Clarify and Explore***

What are the other person's needs and concerns?  
Explore what is behind the words being used. Ask questions to shift the focus from anger to exploring the issues. Focus on connecting to the other person and turning this into a safe and constructive conversation. Repeat the cycle. Ensure that both feelings and facts are mutually understood.

## ***Move***

Clarify and acknowledge needs and concerns.  
Consider the next step e.g. acknowledge your contribution to their problem, develop options, make an "I" statement, take time out.

