

## FEELINGS

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Feelings are as natural and integral a part of us as our hair or our eyes. Everyone has them...lots of them. Feelings are as essential to our well being as breathing.

It is important to understand that feelings are never right or wrong, good or bad. They just are! We cannot prevent a feeling from existing inside of us. We can only control how we express that feeling or show that feeling to others.

Feelings are different than thoughts...yet connected to our bodies. For instance, if you look at your watch and realize that traffic has slowed you down, you know that you will be late for your appointment. This can cause you to feel apprehensive which can cause your heart to race or your stomach to ache. As human beings we are unique in that we are connected to ourselves...spiritually, mentally and physically.

There are two basic feelings or emotions – joyful and painful. Joyful feelings give a sense of strength, wholeness or well-being. Painful feelings cause us to feel drained, empty, or alone. Yet, painful feelings, while being uncomfortable, are telling us something. Such feelings are a message that something important may be happening and needs our attention.

A feeling is something inside that is only shared on the outside. It is different than a mood which is a feeling minus the words. We can only share a mood when it changes into a feeling. We are born with five natural feelings: joy, sadness, anger, love and fear.

A child's response to feelings changes with age:

### **Birth to 3 years**

Little children are unable to talk about their feelings. They are only capable of expressing them in the present. They cannot distinguish between life and death, one week or three weeks, yesterday and today.

### **4-5 years**

Preschool children begin to use words to describe their feelings along with expressing them. It is important and necessary for a significant adult to try to put into words what they think the child might be feeling.

### **6-13 years**

Elementary age children begin to own their feelings, but the focus is on the outside, i.e., "that makes me angry" instead of "I am angry".

### **14-17 years**

Adolescent age children become capable of separating inner and outer feelings.

### **18+ years**

Later adolescent-age young adults become capable of explaining their own feelings.

Being aware of our feelings and their natural flow has several advantages. Our feelings both warn us and assure us. They act as indicators of how we are at the moment or over a stretch of time. Feelings can gauge of our sense of being fully alive.

Feelings can be locked inside and consequently, keep an experience very much alive. If this is a pain-filled emotion, the weight of it can drag us down year after year. To prevent being diminished in any way, it is important that we recognize that the feeling exists, understand why it is there, talk about it with someone that is trustworthy, let go of it, and move on.

Our feelings reflect the way we perceive the world around us, as well as ourselves. Without awareness of our feelings, we have no real awareness of life itself. We may be afraid to express our honest feelings out of fear or rejections, ridicule, or loss of control of our feelings. The negative feelings, such as anger, depression or loneliness, are often buried deep inside. But these feelings are buried alive and in time will surface. Unfortunately, they may appear when we least expect them and we may misdirect them.

It is essential that we express our honest feelings. Feelings can keep people apart or bring them together; they can build walls or build bridges. What is important is that they are shared with a significant someone in our lives. The expression of feelings will not always change a situation, but it may change the understanding and attitude regarding the situation.