

RONALD J. FREDERICK, Ph.D.

Living
LIKE YOU
MEAN IT



Use the WISDOM and POWER
of Your EMOTIONS to Get the
Life You Really Want

Living Like You Mean It: Use ...

Frederick, Ph.D., Ronald J.

CHAPTER 3

STEP ONE

Becoming Aware of Your Feelings

Let's not forget that the little emotions are the great captains of our lives. And we obey them without realizing it.

—VINCENT VAN GOGH

MARK LOOKED DOWN AT THE PIANO KEYS AND STUDIED them for a moment. He could feel his heart beating loudly and the perspiration forming on his forehead. He steadied himself on the piano bench and took a deep breath.

This was it, his audition for the music therapy program at the local university, the only school to which he had applied. It could be a promising moment for him, yet he seemed to feel regretful. Or was it embarrassed? Probably the latter, as he anticipated that he was about to make a fool of himself. But how he truly felt wasn't clear. *Why didn't I practice more?* he asked himself with frustration.

Good question. In the weeks leading up to his audition, he often seemed to

find something else to do—running from one thing to the next, whiling away an hour or two chatting on the phone while playing video games. Once in a while he'd sit down at the piano to practice for a bit and then abruptly quit when it got challenging, shrugging it off as ridiculous that he would have to memorize a piece of classical music.

It's not that the audition wasn't on his radar. Somewhere in his peripheral awareness he could sense the clock ticking, and if he let that come into focus, it made him nervous. Or was it excited? He couldn't tell.

Neither could anyone else, for that matter. In fact, to some he appeared not to care. Whenever anyone asked him how it was going he'd either get skittish, change the subject, or say that things were "just fine."

If he'd let himself slow down and sit with his feelings for a moment or two, Mark might actually have been able to get a clearer sense of what he really wanted to do. Ever since he was a child, he always loved making music, especially when his family would get together and sing around the piano. He started taking piano lessons at a young age and was soon leading the family sing-alongs and playing for school concerts and church services. His musical ability and a compassion for others seemed to make music therapy a good match for him. Or did it? He wasn't sure. Well, sometimes he was, but other times he wasn't.

Maybe that's why he barely made it to the audition on time. *What am I doing?* Mark thought to himself. He sat up straight, adjusted himself on the bench, and took another deep breath. He looked over at the evaluator, who seemed to be growing impatient. *I wonder if she can see my hands shaking?* he thought, as he lifted them to the keys and started to play . . .

Guilt-Shame

- Inclination to avert the eyes
- Head may go down
- An impulse to withdraw, pull away, or hide
- An overall sense of heaviness
- Decreased energy
- A sickening feeling inside (with shame, in particular)

Perhaps you have experienced a few of these sensations, maybe more. You may have also noted your unique experience of a feeling not on the list. Great! You're becoming aware of your individual felt experience. You're developing emotional mindfulness.

Remember, emotional mindfulness is a skill and, like any other skill, can be learned and developed. It takes practice.

Here's what you do: at any time you want to, stop and ask yourself, *What am I feeling?* and then tune in to what's happening inside you right in that moment. Not what you think should be happening, not what you wish were happening, but what *is* happening. Consciously direct your attention to your felt experience. When your mind starts to wander or your thoughts start to take over, remind yourself to come back to your body and then do just that. Watch and observe. Each time you repeat this behavior, each time you bring your focus back to your body sensations, you're developing a new habit. You're training your mind to be aware of and pay attention to your emotional experience.

It's important to approach emotional mindfulness from a place of openness, acceptance, and zero judgment. In the world of your emotions, there is no right or wrong. The task is just to be aware and to stay present

and focused.



As Mark practiced emotional mindfulness, his awareness of his felt experience grew. Needless to say, there was a lot more feeling inside him than he realized. But in his efforts to open up to his emotions, he also began to discover the many different ways in which he avoided them. And that's where we turn our attention in the next chapter: to our defenses.

CHAPTER TAKE-HOME POINTS

- Unacknowledged feelings negatively affect our experience and behavior.
- With practice, you can become more consciously aware of your emotions.
- Feelings are felt in the body.
- Thinking distances you from your feelings.
- Mindfully tuning in to your body sensations brings you closer to your feelings.
- There are eight basic emotions on which all the others are based.
- How you experience your feelings is neither right nor wrong—it just is.

Whatever, Mark said to himself as he left the room and hurried down the hall. *I guess I didn't want it bad enough*. He grabbed his coat and made a dash for the parking lot. He didn't seem to notice that there were tears in his eyes.

WHEN IGNORANCE IS NOT BLISS

What's going on with Mark? How could he not know what he really wants? Why didn't he prepare for the audition? What's making him feel so conflicted?

Mark's problem is not that he's without feelings. To the contrary, if he'd just scratch the surface a little he'd see that there's a lot going on inside him. And if he were able to spend some time with and make use of his feelings, he probably wouldn't feel so mixed up. There's plenty of energy there that could help motivate him, and more than enough information that could provide some useful guidance.

For instance, maybe he'd discover that he's actually excited about trying to get into this program, but that whenever he gets excited about something he'd like to do, he starts to feel anxious and then distracts himself. If he were able to separate out his excitement and learn how to tolerate his fears, maybe moving forward wouldn't be so scary, maybe he'd feel freed up to follow his dreams, maybe he'd tap into a well of excitement that would energize him to make a go of it and see what he could accomplish.

But that's putting the cart before the horse. The main problem at this point

is that Mark isn't even *aware* that he's having feelings. He doesn't recognize or pay attention to the signs. He never stops long enough to notice them and then follow their lead to discover what's happening for him on an emotional level.

At first glance, Mark might seem like an extreme example of someone out of touch with his feelings. But actually, the way he's behaving is pretty common. It's so easy for us to go through life oblivious of the signs that we're actually having feelings. We walk, jog, or race through our day only marginally aware of what's going on inside us. We get wrapped up in our thoughts, questioning ourselves, lost in a haze of worries and contradictions and oblivious to our internal reactions. We get so caught up in the past or future that we don't even notice what's going on in the present moment. And on the occasion when we recognize that we might be feeling something, as soon as we feel the slightest bit of distress, we're back to our avoidant strategies.

The time has come to do something different. If we really want to get somewhere good, somewhere better, we need to open our eyes and wake up to what's going on inside us. We need to put the brakes on, slow down, and tune in to our internal experience. In short, we need to develop what I call *emotional mindfulness*.

EMOTIONAL MINDFULNESS

The concept of mindfulness is not new. It's been around for decades, with roots that go all the way back to the contemplative practices of both eastern

and western spiritual traditions. In recent years it has become popular not just in the field of behavioral medicine but among the general public as well.

Our attraction to mindfulness probably has a lot to do with a growing dissatisfaction with our quality of life. The deadening effects of our current culture of multitasking, high-tech distractions, and increased life demands—the inevitable fallout from living mindlessly—are catching up to us. Many of us are eager to find a way to bring some vitality back into our lives. In addition, ample scientific proof demonstrating that mindfulness has the power to improve our physical, mental, and social well-being has further contributed to its popularity.¹

What exactly is mindfulness? Jon Kabat-Zinn, a leader in bringing mindfulness into the mainstream of modern medicine and founder of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction program at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center, defines mindfulness as “Paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally.”² The nonjudgmental aspect of mindfulness seeks to free us from the intellectual analysis and self-criticism with which we so often react to ourselves, the ongoing commentary and chatter in our head that alienates us from our felt experience. The idea of paying attention on purpose recognizes that it takes effort not to get caught up in our habitual ways of responding but to stay clear and focused. Mindfulness encourages us to let go of our absorption in the past and our dreams for the future and really allow ourselves to fully embrace the present moment. It involves getting curious about one’s experience as it’s unfolding, not thinking about it, but just noticing and observing it. In essence, mindfulness is open-minded, focused attention on our here-and-now experience. The practice of mindfulness seeks to increase our ability to be more wholly engaged in the present

moment—fully awake and aware.

Emotional mindfulness, as the phrase implies, applies the basic principles of mindfulness to our emotional experience. Simply put, it’s about purposely paying attention to our physically felt emotional experience as it happens. For instance, noticing when a feeling rises up in you and what this is like. Noticing when and where you feel constricted, where energy stops and where energy flows. Noticing when your face heats up, your chest aches or expands, your breathing changes, your arms tingle, your legs tremble. Noticing how you react to your experience—noticing whatever is there and seeing what happens. The aim of emotional mindfulness is to help us be more consciously aware of our feelings and, ultimately, more fully present with them.

How do you do this? You start by slowing down, going inward, and just noticing. Later in the chapter, we’ll be discussing the actual process, as well as the core emotions and the ways they commonly manifest themselves in our body. But for now, the first step is just to accept that the key to awareness of our emotions is rooted in our bodily experience—not in our mind. Emotional mindfulness sounds simple, and in a way it is, but it takes practice. However, it doesn’t have to be burdensome or to feel like homework. You don’t have to set aside a great deal of time every day to make it happen. It can be done anytime, anyplace. You just need to stop for a moment and check in with yourself.

One of the first hurdles to emotional mindfulness has to do with what I call “making room”—clearing away the clutter so you can see what’s going on. When there’s too much happening, when two, three, five things are going on at once, it’s impossible to notice what’s happening inside. We need to

slow down for a moment, make some room, and then do one thing and one thing alone: tune in to our body.

You may be wondering why I put so much emphasis on the body. Although emotions originate in the brain, we experience them first in our body. It's why they're called "feelings." They make themselves known through energy, sensations, and bodily reactions, and we *feel* them. At times, our emotions come upon us so rapidly and with such intensity that there's no denying their existence. At other times, however, their presentation can be vague. If you have feelings phobia, emotions can be difficult to detect, as they're often hidden by anxiety. But the discomfort we feel can actually be a useful tool, a signpost that our emotions are not far away. Mindfully tuning in to body sensations increases our conscious awareness of our feelings, opens us up to new information, and brings us closer to our core emotional experience.

IT JUST DOES THAT SOMETIMES

It was five after the hour of his appointment, and I began to wonder where Mark was. Then I heard him coming down the hall. Well, what I heard was his voice on his cell phone as he approached the waiting room, growing louder as he got closer.

"Yeah, yeah, okay, sounds good. Look, I need to get going. I'm at an appointment," and with that he burst through the door and hurried into my office. "I'm sorry I'm late. I hit some traffic on the way over and then I got a phone call as I was pulling into the parking lot. I probably shouldn't have taken it, but it was from my brother. We're getting together after this." He let

out a big sigh as he threw his coat and backpack on the couch and sat down across from me.

Mark first came to see me a few weeks prior to this visit, about a year after he had had his audition for the music therapy program. He told me that his life was a "mess" and that he hoped that I could help him figure out what he wanted to do and get some sense of direction. It didn't take long to see that Mark was pretty disconnected from his emotional life. Recognizing that he had a feelings phobia, I was trying to help him become more aware of his feelings.

After settling in, he started to talk about his brother, whom he described as being quite different than him—"a jock, competitive, and conservative."

"How are you feeling about getting together with him?" I asked.

He crossed his legs, and his foot started nervously bouncing up and down. "Um, all right I guess," he responded with a shrug. "I mean, we're just going to have coffee." His body seemed to convey something different as he tensed up and looked away.

"So you're feeling fine about it?" I asked, not convinced.

He looked back at me and said, "Yeah, for the most part."

"Well, you don't look so fine. What's going on with your foot?" I asked, hoping to help Mark become more mindful of his felt experience.

He looked at his foot and noticed it shaking, uncrossed his legs, and put both feet on the floor. "Oh, it just does that sometimes," he said uncomfortably and then looked out the window again. "I've got a lot going

on. I guess I'm feeling stressed. I've been thinking that I should really get back to the gym. That always helps. But then I wonder when the hell am I going to fit that in? I mean, I should probably try to go before work, but then ..."

I could see that Mark was getting caught up in his thoughts and losing sight of some useful information, so I interrupted him and tried to get him to focus back on his body. "Well, maybe it has something to do with being stressed, but your foot started shaking right when I asked you how you were feeling about getting together with your brother. Did you notice that? Perhaps, in this moment, it's telling you something. Why don't you take a minute and try to pay attention to what's there. Give yourself some room to see what you notice going on inside you."

He sat for a moment and seemed to be focusing inward. I wondered what he might touch. After a moment he sighed and said, "I guess I'm not really looking forward to seeing him." As he turned toward me, and I could see that he looked distressed.

LEFT OR RIGHT, WHICH WAY SHOULD I GO?

By beginning to pay attention to his body, by becoming more mindful of his felt experience, Mark is on the road toward greater self-awareness. Clearly he has some feelings toward his brother that are not easy for him to look at and are making him uncomfortable. Who knows what we'll discover, but at least now we're headed in the right direction—toward his feelings, instead of away from them.

Like many of us, one of the traps that Mark falls into is to overthink things. He can all too easily get preoccupied with worries or concerns, trying to examine a dilemma from every possible angle, running it over again and again in his head. It's a pretty common habit. We're so used to focusing on our thoughts instead of spending time with our feelings that it can be quite a challenge to quiet the chatter in our head and shift our attention to our felt experience. The truth is, the more lost we get in our thoughts, the further we are from connecting with our emotions.

Let's talk a little about the brain again. But I need to start off by making a slight disclaimer.

When people talk about the brain, there's a tendency to make generalizations about which side is in charge of what. In reality, it is not so black and white. There is much more overlap. For many different functions, both sides of the brain make important contributions and work together.

Now, having made this qualification, I can also accurately say that the different sides of the brain do indeed have different strengths. For instance, the left hemisphere of the brain—the "verbal" side—is a sort of hub for logical, linguistic, and linear processing. It is less sensitive to our bodily state and reactions and is therefore able to use reason and analysis to make sense of our experience. The right hemisphere is particularly attuned to sensations, sounds, and images—the nonverbal language of emotion—and, as such, is deftly able to read our felt experience.

The upshot of this neurological design is that when we are attempting to be more fully aware of our emotions, the right side of the brain is our friend, and the left side can be a bit of a troublemaker. When we focus on our thoughts—which originate in the left brain—we can get caught in our head

thinking about things and lose touch with the somatic sensations, the visual imagery, the bodily reactions (for example, changes in our muscles, stomach, intestines, heart, and lungs) that are a part of our emotional experience. Thinking makes it harder for us to connect with our feelings. It's not that thinking is a bad thing, but when we're trying to be mindful of our emotional experience, it can be a hindrance. If we want to be more aware of our feelings, we need to quiet the left side of the brain and let the right side have some room.

Of course we can't just flip a switch and turn a side of our brain on or off. But we certainly can choose where we put our attention. We can shift our focus away from our thoughts and make some internal space to tune in, observe, and listen to what's going on in our body. In short, our main goal at this point is not to think but just to notice. This approach is at the heart of mindfulness.

Bottom Up Versus Top Down

Another helpful guide to follow to cultivate emotional mindfulness is to work from the "bottom up."³ Visualize it this way: thinking happens in your head (the top), and feeling happens at the level of your body (the bottom). For most people, our usual mode of operation is to work from the top down, to think about things first and then figure out how we feel. Well, you know where that gets us—stuck in our head and out of touch with our heart. A more emotionally mindful approach is to work from the bottom up, from the level of our

felt experience, what we're feeling physically, up to the level of thought. In short: feel first and then think about it.

Try this: zoom in on your felt experience, notice what you're feeling in your body, how it's reacting, and what it wants to do. Scan your body and see what you feel. Notice any sensations in your neck, chest, arms, legs, and elsewhere, and listen to them, listen to what they are trying to convey. Make space for your felt experience and see where it takes you. Later, reflect on your experience; explore what it was like for you, where it came from, and where it brought you. As you consider your experience, let it make sense of itself, let meaning emerge organically.

CHOICES, CHOICES, CHOICES

I never really liked the color I had chosen to paint our living room. I wanted something golden and warm, but what I finally chose, after much deliberation, ended up looking yellow—canary yellow. I thought I'd get used to it, but I never did. It just wasn't me. It's not that I don't like bright colors, but when it comes to the walls in my house, I think it's safe to say that I'm more of an earth-tone kind of guy. So it was only a matter of time before I just couldn't stand living in Disneyland anymore and decided to repaint. I took a trip over to the local paint store to find the perfect color.

This time I'll get it right! I thought as I pulled into the parking lot. But my confidence was short lived. As I marched through the front doors, I came face-to-face with two giant walls of color swatches. Hundreds of them. Each with five, six, seven different shades of a similar color. Now I'm sure some creative type would be thrilled with the plethora of choices, but I was not. It made me start to panic. *How the heck am I going to chose?* I thought to myself as I collapsed into a chair, bewildered.

Then, as luck would have it, I spotted a stack of brochures on the table next to me. I picked up the first one: "Interior Inspirations." I opened it and discovered a small collection of perfectly lovely paint colors, two dozen at most. *Now we're talking*, I thought as a sense of calm washed over me.

Sometimes there is such a thing as too many options.

BACK TO BASICS

When I first ask some of my clients to tell me what they are feeling, they're stumped. It's not that they aren't having feelings—even though they often "feel" that way—they're just not sure what to call them.

One of the problems is that they feel overwhelmed with choices. They think there are a million different options, and, just as I felt in the paint store, they don't know where to start. But that is a trap. There really aren't that many choices. Although it may seem as though there are as many different feelings as there are colors on those two walls of paint swatches, they really are all just variations and blends of a few emotions.

Although some theorists disagree about which emotions should make the list, in general the spectrum of our emotions is actually made up of eight primary feelings and their related shades and combinations. They are

- *Anger*: irritation, annoyance, frustration, exasperation, dislike, resentment, rage
- *Sadness*: disappointment, dismay, loneliness, hurt, despair, sorrow, grief, dejection
- *Happiness*: contentment, satisfaction, amusement, enjoyment, enthusiasm, excitement, pride, delight, joy, elation, euphoria
- *Love*: friendliness, caring, affection, tenderness, compassion, desire, passion
- *Fear*: concern, nervousness, worry, wariness, anxiety, distress, terror, dread, panic, fright
- *Guilt-shame*: embarrassment, regret, remorse, humiliation, mortification
- *Surprise*: amazement, astonishment, awe, wonder, shock
- *Disgust*: contempt, disdain, aversion, distaste, revulsion

Each of these eight basic emotions serves as a sort of shorthand for a range of feelings. As you looked over this list, you may have noticed that the various feelings in each of the groups can be seen as falling along a continuum. For instance, anger might start out as annoyance or irritation, but if we continue to be threatened or thwarted, it can grow to a point where we're feeling enraged. In both cases, at the core we're feeling anger, but rage is a much more intense version of anger than irritation. Similarly, in the case of sadness, if we were to experience a minor loss, such as not winning the lottery, we might feel disappointed (depending on how much the jackpot was!). But a much greater loss, such as the death of a loved one, would cause

us to feel grief. Again, in each situation, we're feeling a degree of the same feeling—in one case less, the other more.

You can use these basic emotions to simplify the task of figuring out what you're feeling. While you might think that having a wide range of options to pick from would be desirable, too many choices can actually make the process of discernment more confusing than it needs to be, especially when your feelings are vague. When feelings come on strong, it's not as hard to determine what you're experiencing. But when they are muted, muddled, or hidden, as is often the case when they are entangled with fear, it's hard to tell. It's far easier to identify what's there when the possibilities are few rather than in the hundreds. Besides, the basic emotions actually cover most of the necessary bases and are all you really need for now.

In fact, for the purposes of our discussion, we're more likely to focus on the first six. In general, most people don't have much of a problem with experiencing surprise or disgust. These are not usually feelings that cause a great deal of anxiety. That's not to say that the different strategies you're learning in order to overcome feelings phobia can't be applied to every feeling, because they absolutely can. This process is broadly applicable, and fear can become associated with any feeling, but the following six feelings are the ones that seem to present the most problems for people:

Anger
Love

Sadness
Fear

Happiness

Guilt-shame

Although this may seem like a limited range, I'm confident that you'll see just how much ground you'll be able to cover with these basic feelings.

Aren't Guilt and Shame the Same Thing?

Although guilt and shame belong to the same family, they differ in a fundamental way. In general, shame has more to do with how you feel about yourself than about something you did. Guilt has to do with the latter. We feel ashamed of ourselves, but guilty for doing something we probably shouldn't have done. It's the difference between "I'm a bad person" (shame) and "I did something bad" (guilt). It's for this reason that I've let them stand alone but together as *guilt-shame*. I don't want this distinction to become overlooked or blurred.

You may be wondering why fear is on the list. Isn't fear the very thing we're trying to overcome? Yes, it is—when it's not warranted. But sometimes being fearful is an adaptive response to have. For instance, we should feel afraid when we're in real danger; it prompts us to do what we need to do to get to safety. However, in the case of a feelings phobia, we can also be afraid of feeling fear. We may experience it as weak, wimpy, foolish, or unmanly, so we fight it, clamp down on it, and try to make it go away. This reaction doesn't allow us to learn how to deal with and use our fear to its advantage.

What Were They Again?

Having trouble recalling what the basic feelings are? Here's a simple way to remember them. Call them *mad*, *sad*, *glad*, *love*, *scared*, and *ashamed* or *guilty*. In fact, you can call them whatever you want as long as it's clear what you're dealing with. Remember, the names are just a shorthand for a few different categories of feelings.

LET'S TRY SOMETHING DIFFERENT

Mark told me a little about how, as a child, he looked up to his brother and was always trying to get his attention. His brother, five years older than Mark, was caught up in his own life—playing sports, hanging out with friends, dating—and barely seemed to notice him. As they got older, Mark's brother seemed to make an effort to try to connect with Mark and get together from time to time. But as far as Mark was concerned, their interactions felt awkward and strained.

I could see the sadness in Mark's eyes as he talked; I said to him empathically, "You look so sad."

"Well, I guess. Maybe. I don't know," he said uncomfortably as he shifted in his chair and tried to shrug it off.

"Mark, there are tears in your eyes. That seems to say something. What's happening inside you?" I asked, hoping he would listen to what was coming up for him.

His focus went back up to his thoughts. "I feel like my brother just doesn't get me. No matter what I do, it just doesn't seem good enough for him. Whenever we get together, I always end up feeling bad, and it takes a day or two for me to shake it. I mean, why do I let it bother me? This is just the way he is, and he's not going to change. Why can't I just accept that we're different and move on?"

I could see that this line of questioning wasn't going to get him anywhere. The left side of his brain (thinking) was turned up so high that he could barely hear what was happening on the right side (emotions). I said to him, "My guess is that it's hard to move on when there are unacknowledged feelings inside you that need some attention." This comment gave Mark pause. "So let's try something different, if that's okay with you."

He nodded, and I considered that to be as good a green light as I was going to get.

"Instead of questioning yourself, try putting your thoughts to the side for a moment and just see if you can notice what's going on in your body, what you're experiencing physically."

He sat very still for a moment. His eyes looked downward, and his head dropped slightly forward. Silence for a bit. And then he looked up at me and

said, “Well, the back of my throat feels a little funny, kind of sore in a way.”

“Okay.” *He’s on to something*, I thought. “What else do you notice?”

Mark paused for a moment, checking in with himself, and then said, “I don’t know; I feel this sort of achy feeling in my chest.”

“And if you just focus on that sensation, what happens?” I asked.

“I don’t like it. It makes me nervous. I want to move on. But if I’m honest with myself, and you, I guess I’m sadder about this than I realized.”

TUNING IN TO YOUR FEELINGS

Mark’s beginning to tune in to his body and become more aware of feelings. He’s developing emotional mindfulness. As he gets out of his head and makes some room for his heart, he begins to notice the physical signs of sadness (soreness in his throat, achy feeling in his chest) as well as the anxiety he feels when he gets closer to his feelings.

We all experience our feelings a little differently. At the same time, even though my experience of sadness might be different from yours, there are particular sensations and bodily reactions that more frequently accompany certain emotions. For instance, the soreness in the back of Mark’s throat that he noticed feeling is fairly common to the experience of sadness. I’m sure it’s what inspired the phrases “I’ve got a lump in my throat” and “I’m all choked up.” Whether your emotional experience is unique or similar to that of many

others, there is no right or wrong. It just is.

Before we get to the sensations that people commonly experience with their feelings, let’s take some time to get a sense of where you are right now in your awareness of your own feelings and their physical manifestations.

Awareness Exercise

Find a quiet place, free from distraction, where you can be free to tune in to what’s going on inside you. Get in a comfortable, relaxed position that allows you to be in full contact with the energy in your body. In general, sitting upright with your back straight and supported and your feet against the floor is best.

For each of the different feelings listed here, recall a time in your life that engendered that emotion. If you have difficulty remembering an event or coming up with a memory that evokes some emotion, try using your imagination to create a scenario that would be likely to cause a reaction. You can imagine something happening to you or to someone else, whichever works. I’ll also give you a few examples to help lead the way, but don’t feel limited to them.

Visualize whatever moment you choose in as much detail as possible. Let the scene play out and let your feelings grow. As you immerse yourself in the experience, pay close attention to what’s happening in your body—in your head, face, neck,

shoulders, back, chest, arms, stomach, legs, everywhere—and write down the physical sensations that you observe.

If you have a hard time connecting with any feelings, don't worry. That's why you're reading this book! Just observe whatever it is that's there, whatever it is that comes up for you. Keep an open mind and put any judgment aside. If you don't notice anything, that's fine too. This exercise is all about getting an idea of where you are now.

1. *Anger*. Try to remember a time in your life when you felt wronged, when your rights were violated, or when you or someone you love was treated unjustly. Imagine witnessing a violation of some kind or being thwarted in some way from reaching a goal. What do you notice happening in your body? What physical sensations are you aware of?

2. *Sadness*. Remember a situation in which you experienced a loss of some kind. Maybe the death of a loved one, a relationship ending, or someone close to you disappointing you in some way. Or imagine someone you love suffering, having to put down a beloved pet, saying good-bye to a close friend before you move away. How does your body react? What do you notice physically?

3. *Happiness*. Recall a moment in your life that delighted you, perhaps a time when you won a competition, completed a project with flying colors, or went on a wonderful vacation. Or

imagine having a great time with a good friend, doing something caring for someone in need, or simply hearing the sound of a child's laughter. How does your body respond? What do you notice?

4. *Love*. Remember a tender moment that you shared with a loved one, an experience when someone really came through for you, or a time when you felt particularly loving toward someone in your life. Imagine being in the presence of someone you love, looking at him or her with affection, sharing a warm embrace. What kind of physical sensations do you experience?

5. *Fear*. Recall a moment in your life when you were in some kind of danger and there was nothing you could do about it. Or imagine being followed as you're walking alone on a dark and desolate street, being on top of a very high building looking over the edge, or whatever kind of situation would be scary for you. As you stay in that moment, what do you notice happening in your body?

6. *Guilt-Shame*. Think about a time when you broke a promise or said or did something that caused someone pain and sorrow. Imagine doing something you knew would hurt or betray a loved one or committing an act that you believe would be in violation of a strict moral code. Think of the most embarrassing experience you ever had, or

picture yourself being humiliated or ridiculed by someone. As you remember or imagine these moments, what physical sensations do you experience?

Okay, now that you're finished, feel free to compare your list with the following descriptions of the common physical manifestations of the six emotions:

Sadness

- Eyelids grow heavy
- Eyes become moist or teary
- The back of your throat feels a little sore
- An achy or heavy sensation in your chest
- Shoulders slouch
- A loss of energy, an all-over sense of heaviness, of slowing down and needing to turn inward

Anger

- Clenched jaw
- Rapid heartbeat
- Increased body heat
- Feeling hot in the face and turning red
- A sense of pressure building up inside accompanied by an impulse to move forward (toward whatever is making you angry), to strike or lash out
- Feeling empowered and strong

Fear

- Cold hands
- Deepened or faster breathing, or holding your breath
- Sweating
- Trembling in the arms or legs
- Tightness in the stomach
- An all-over sense of shakiness
- Increased blood flow to the legs accompanied by an impulse to move back, get away, or run (so you can get out of harm's way)

Happiness

- Smile
- Eyes widen
- An expansive feeling in the chest
- An overall sense of lightness or buoyancy
- Warm feelings inside
- Increased energy
- A sense of enthusiasm and readiness to engage

Love

- An expansive feeling, as though the heart were swelling
- Feeling warm inside, as if you were melting
- Goose bumps or tingly feelings
- Feeling of tenderness toward another
- An inclination to move forward, to embrace and be affectionate
- Feeling calm and content

Guilt-Shame

- Inclination to avert the eyes
- Head may go down
- An impulse to withdraw, pull away, or hide
- An overall sense of heaviness
- Decreased energy
- A sickening feeling inside (with shame, in particular)

Perhaps you have experienced a few of these sensations, maybe more. You may have also noted your unique experience of a feeling not on the list. Great! You're becoming aware of your individual felt experience. You're developing emotional mindfulness.

Remember, emotional mindfulness is a skill and, like any other skill, can be learned and developed. It takes practice.

Here's what you do: at any time you want to, stop and ask yourself, *What am I feeling?* and then tune in to what's happening inside you right in that moment. Not what you think should be happening, not what you wish were happening, but what *is* happening. Consciously direct your attention to your felt experience. When your mind starts to wander or your thoughts start to take over, remind yourself to come back to your body and then do just that. Watch and observe. Each time you repeat this behavior, each time you bring your focus back to your body sensations, you're developing a new habit. You're training your mind to be aware of and pay attention to your emotional experience.

It's important to approach emotional mindfulness from a place of openness, acceptance, and zero judgment. In the world of your emotions, there is no right or wrong. The task is just to be aware and to stay present

and focused.



As Mark practiced emotional mindfulness, his awareness of his felt experience grew. Needless to say, there was a lot more feeling inside him than he realized. But in his efforts to open up to his emotions, he also began to discover the many different ways in which he avoided them. And that's where we turn our attention in the next chapter: to our defenses.

CHAPTER TAKE-HOME POINTS

- Unacknowledged feelings negatively affect our experience and behavior.
- With practice, you can become more consciously aware of your emotions.
- Feelings are felt in the body.
- Thinking distances you from your feelings.
- Mindfully tuning in to your body sensations brings you closer to your feelings.
- There are eight basic emotions on which all the others are based.
- How you experience your feelings is neither right nor wrong—it just is.