

From Feeling to Need

*An illustrated practice workbook for understanding emotions,
finding what matters, and speaking with care*

1

NOTICE

Name it precisely

2

PAUSE

Ground or explore

3

LISTEN

Signal, body, meaning

4

NEED

What matters here?

5

ASK

A clear, workable
request

A learning path — not a test. You can loop back at any stage.

A note before you begin

This is a guide for gentle practice, ideally alongside counselling. You never have to push through. If you feel overwhelmed, numb, unsafe, or unable to stay orientated, pause, return to the room, and seek support rather than continuing the exercise.

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Welcome

The aim is not to get rid of feeling. It is to become more able to listen, choose, and connect. This workbook develops a practical form of emotional literacy — moving from a raw moment of feeling to a clearer sense of what matters, and then, if it is safe and useful, to a request someone can hear.

WHAT YOU ARE LEARNING

- 1 Notice with more precision**
Move beyond "fine", "stressed" or "angry" — precision makes a response easier to choose.
- 2 Make room before meaning**
Check whether you are steady enough to explore. Grounding is a skill, not a detour.
- 3 Separate signal from story**
The feeling is real. The first explanation your mind supplies may be only one possible account.
- 4 Identify what matters**
Name the underlying need or value — safety, connection, choice, recognition, rest, or repair.
- 5 Ask without blame**
Turn the need into one small, specific, negotiable request — or decide what support you can offer yourself.
- 6 Learn by returning**
Short, repeated practice builds the skill. You are not expected to get it "right" the first time.

The core idea

Emotions are useful information, but they are not verdicts. They can reflect what is happening now, what you have learned to expect, your body's level of stress, and the meaning you make of a situation. This guide treats them as signals to become curious about — not commands to obey, and not proof that your first story is correct.

A map, not a diagnosis

Different cultures, theories and people group emotions in different ways. The words and pathways here are prompts for self-understanding, not a fixed taxonomy of "basic" emotions, and not a way of deciding what you should feel.

The Path — A Five-Stage Practice

You can use the whole sequence after a difficult moment, or take one stage at a time.



Stage	A useful question	What you are building
1. Notice	What am I feeling, as precisely as I can?	Emotion vocabulary and awareness.
2. Pause	Am I steady enough to explore — or do I need to ground first?	Choice and nervous-system care.
3. Listen	What is the feeling drawing my attention to?	Curiosity about body, situation and meaning.
4. Need	What matters here — beneath the first story or demand?	A distinction between needs and strategies.
5. Ask	What is one fair, clear and workable next step?	Communication, self-support and repair.

HOW TO USE IT

- Start with ordinary, low-stakes moments: irritation in a queue, a disappointing text, relief after a task is finished.
- Write in fragments. This is not a test of eloquence.
- Do not use the workbook to force a difficult conversation while you are flooded or shut down.
- Bring patterns, questions and unfinished entries to counselling. The unfinished parts are often the most useful.

Before Step 1 — Ground First When You Need To

Emotional awareness works best when there is enough safety and steadiness to stay present.

BEFORE YOU GO INWARD, CHECK YOUR STATE

STEADY ENOUGH

I can notice what is happening, stay orientated, and choose my next step.

EXPLORE GENTLY

TOO ACTIVATED

Racing, panicky, flooded, impulsive, unable to think clearly.

GROUND FIRST

SHUT DOWN

Numb, far away, blank, frozen, or detached from the room.

ORIENT FIRST

A SIMPLE 60-SECOND RESET

Orient	Anchor
Look slowly around the room. Name five ordinary things you can see. Let your eyes settle on one neutral object.	Feel both feet on the floor or the support of the chair. Lengthen the out-breath a little if that is comfortable

▲ When to stop

If you become more distressed, disorientated, unable to stay in the present, or have thoughts of harming yourself or someone else, stop this exercise and use your agreed support plan or urgent local help. Deep inward attention is never the only route to care.

STAGE 1

NOTICE — Find a More Precise Word

Purpose: Emotion vocabulary and awareness

Precision does not make a feeling bigger. It can make your next step more targeted. "Stressed" might contain fear, anger, sadness, overwhelm, or all of these — the point of naming is to find a word close enough to be helpful.

Cluster	Possible words	What to wonder about
Anger / protest	irritated · frustrated · resentful · furious	What feels crossed, blocked, unfair or important?
Fear / threat	uneasy · nervous · anxious · scared · panicked	What feels uncertain, unsafe or out of control?
Loss / low mood	disappointed · lonely · sad · grieving · hopeless	What is missing, ending, or needing comfort?
Self-conscious	embarrassed · exposed · ashamed · guilty · remorseful	Belonging, a value, repair, or harsh self-judgement?
Aversion	reluctant · uncomfortable · disgusted · contemptuous	What feels misaligned, unsafe or too close?
Positive movement	content · relieved · grateful · proud · delighted	What is going well, being restored, or worth savouring?
Change / uncertainty	startled · confused · surprised · disorientated	What has changed? What do I need to understand?

A two-minute check-in

Pause. Notice the room and your body — you do not need to change anything. Ask: "What am I feeling right now?" Let a first broad word arrive, then choose a more specific word from the table, or use your own. Complete: "I notice I am feeling _____. It is strongest in my _____."

Useful sentence stem

"Part of me feels _____. Another part may feel _____." Mixed feelings are common — you do not have to choose only one.

STAGE 2

LISTEN — Signal, Story, Body, Meaning

Purpose: Curiosity about body, situation and meaning

An emotion can point to something that matters without telling you exactly what happened or what to do.

THE HELPFUL DISTINCTION: SIGNAL ≠ STORY ≠ NEED ≠ STRATEGY



Treat an emotion as information worth listening to — not proof that a particular story is true, or an instruction to act.

USE THIS AS A CURIOUS FIRST PASS

If you notice...	You might gently ask...
Anger or irritation	What feels crossed, blocked or unfair? Is there a boundary, value or hurt underneath?
Fear or anxiety	What feels uncertain or unsafe? What information, preparation, support or slowing-down would help?
Sadness or grief	What is missing, ending or unmet? What would comfort, remembrance or company look like?
Shame or embarrassment	What feels exposed? Whose standard is active? What would acceptance, kindness or perspective offer?
Guilt or remorse	Have I acted against a value? Is repair possible — and can I distinguish responsibility from self-punishment?
Joy or relief	What is being met or restored? How might I notice, celebrate or make room for more of it?

A compassionate reality check

After you have named a story, ask: "What else might be true?" and "What facts do I actually have?" This does not dismiss the feeling — it keeps curiosity wider than one interpretation.

STAGE 3

FOCUS — Listen to the Felt Sense

Purpose: Body-aware attention to what is not yet in words

Focusing is a gentle, body-aware way of staying with an unclear "whole feel" long enough for language or an image to emerge. This is not a search for the "real answer" — it is an experiment in patient attention. If your body says "too much", return to grounding or bring it to a session instead.

1 Make a little space

→ *"I can feel this, and I am also here in the room."*

2 Sense the whole of it

→ *Where does this live in the body — tight, heavy, cold, buzzing, hollow?*

3 Find a handle

→ *A word, phrase or image: "a knot", "held breath", "a wall", "grey".*

4 Check the fit

→ *"Is it a knot?" — try it inwardly and see how the feeling responds.*

5 Ask softly

→ *"What is the worst of this?" · "What does this need?" · "What would feel one step kinder?"*

6 Receive, then pause

→ *"Thank you."*

If nothing comes

"Blank", "numb" and "I do not know" are valid observations. Do not turn the practice into a performance. Write down what was present and return to it with support if useful.

STAGE 4

NEED — Name What Matters

Purpose: A distinction between needs and strategies

A need is the underlying quality you are trying to protect or restore. A strategy is one possible way of doing that. The research literature most strongly supports autonomy, competence and relatedness as basic psychological needs; the broader headings below help make this practical in everyday life.

Need area	It can include...	A question to test it
Safety & steadiness	physical safety, trust, predictability, protection, reassurance	"If I felt safer, what would soften?"
Connection & belonging	being seen, inclusion, closeness, care, not being alone	"Do I need contact, understanding or a sense I matter?"
Autonomy & voice	choice, freedom, consent, space, self-direction	"Where do I need more say or room?"
Competence & growth	effectiveness, learning, contribution, confidence, support	"What would help me feel more capable?"
Respect & fairness	dignity, acknowledgement, equity, being taken seriously	"What feels disregarded or unjust?"
Rest & comfort	quiet, recovery, ease, soothing, reduced demand	"Is my system asking for less, not more?"
Meaning & values	integrity, purpose, contribution, faith, coherence	"What value is this touching?"
Understanding & repair	clarity, truth, accountability, apology, forgiveness	"What needs to be known, explained or put right?"

Test the need against your body

Say it quietly: "What matters here is _____. " Notice whether there is a small sense of recognition, easing, or "yes". Ask whether there is a second need beneath the first. Then separate it from the strategy: "What are three ways this need might be supported?"

Needs are not demands

"I need you to reply within an hour" is a strategy. The need may be reassurance, connection or predictability. Naming the need creates more than one possible route forward.

STAGE 5

ASK — Express Without Provoking

Purpose: Communication, self-support and repair

Clear communication does not control another person's response. It gives the conversation its best chance of staying connected.

BUILD A BRIDGE: OBSERVATION + FEELING + NEED + REQUEST

1. OBSERVATION	"When I didn't hear from you for two days..."
2. FEELING	"...I felt anxious and hurt..."
3. NEED	"...because reassurance and consideration matter to me."
4. REQUEST	"Would you be willing to send a message when plans change?"

Move away from...	Move towards...
Character judgements: "You are selfish."	Camera facts: "The plan changed after I had travelled there."
Absolutes: "You never listen."	One moment: "When I was interrupted twice yesterday..."
Mind-reading: "You do not care."	Your experience: "I felt hurt and unsure what it meant."
Demands: "You have to..."	A doable request: "Would you be willing to...?"

Sometimes the best first request is to yourself

"I need ten minutes to settle before we continue." "I need to write this down before I decide what I want to say." Pausing can be an act of communication, not avoidance.

Putting It Together — A Worked Example

A partner is forty minutes late and has not sent a message.

Stage	What the person notices
1. Notice	"I am annoyed — and underneath it I am worried." The body feels hot in the chest and tight in the stomach.
2. Pause	They notice they are too charged to begin the conversation. They take a short walk, feel their feet on the pavement, and decide to talk after dinner.
3. Listen	The first story is: "I am an afterthought." They check the facts — the person may have been delayed; they do not yet know why. The felt sense is "a clenched fist around a held breath."
4. Need	The phrase that fits: "I want to be taken into account, and I need reassurance that they are safe." Needs: consideration, connection and predictability.
5. Ask	"When you arrived forty minutes later than planned and I had not heard from you, I felt anxious and then resentful. I need reassurance and to feel taken into account when plans change. Would you be willing to send a quick message if you are going to be more than fifteen minutes late?"

What this example does not assume

It does not assume the other person intended harm, that they will agree, or that the request solves the whole relationship. It makes one moment discussable, while keeping the speaker's experience clear.

Practice Page — One Moment, Slowly Explored

Use this after a manageable emotional moment. You can complete only the sections that help.

The situation — What happened that a camera could have recorded?

1. Notice — My broad feeling was: _____. A more precise word is: _____.

2. Pause — Am I steady enough to explore? If not, what will help me ground?

3. Listen — Where do I notice this in my body? What image, word or quality fits?

4. Need — What matters underneath? Is this a need, or a particular strategy?

5. Ask — What is one fair, specific and negotiable request (to myself or someone else)?

What did I learn? What would I like to bring to counselling?

Make It a Skill — Small Repetitions Change the Texture of the Work

The aim is familiarity, not perfect insight.

When	Practice	Time
Once a day	Name one feeling and one body cue: "Right now, I notice ____ in my ____."	60 sec
After a small upset	Write the signal, the first story, and one possible need. Do not send a message yet.	3–5 min
Once a week	Review entries. What words, situations or needs recur? What support helps you stay steady?	10 min
Before a hard conversation	Ground, draft the observation–feeling–need–request sentence, then choose the time carefully.	5–10 min

Signs the learning is working

You have more than one word for "upset". You can notice a body cue before you act on it. You can hold "I feel this" alongside "I may not know the whole story yet". Your requests become smaller, clearer and more achievable. You can pause, ask for time, or seek support without treating that as failure.

A gentle measure of progress

Progress is not feeling calm all the time. It is having a little more choice about what you do with what you feel.

Quick Reference — Five Questions to Carry With You

A compact version for the phone, notebook or fridge.

1 NOTICE Name it precisely	2 PAUSE Ground or explore	3 LISTEN Signal, body, meaning	4 NEED What matters here?	5 ASK A clear, workable request
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NOTICE	What am I feeling — more precisely than "fine", "stressed" or "angry"?
PAUSE	Am I steady enough to explore? If not, what helps me ground or orient?
LISTEN	What is this drawing attention to? What facts and stories am I holding?
NEED	What matters here: safety, connection, choice, competence, respect, rest, meaning, repair?
ASK	What is one clear, kind and negotiable next step — to myself or another person?

Remember

A feeling is real. It is information, not an instruction, verdict or proof of one story.

A simple sentence

"When _____ happened, I felt _____. What matters to me is _____. Would you be willing to _____?"

Evidence & Notes — What Informed This Workbook

This section is here for transparency. It is not intended as self-diagnosis or a substitute for individual clinical judgement.

Emotion naming: Research on emotional granularity supports the practical value of distinguishing one feeling from another, while leaving open questions about measurement and cause.

Affect labelling: Putting feelings into words has been associated with changes in neural responses to affective stimuli — a rationale for the naming practice, not a promise that naming alone resolves distress.

Focusing: The six movements are retained as a flexible scaffold. The International Focusing Institute cautions that they are not a rigid agenda for the inner world.

Needs: The workbook distinguishes a broad practical needs map from Self-Determination Theory's more specifically researched needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness.

Communication: The observation–feeling–need–request structure is adapted from Nonviolent Communication as a conversation scaffold, with room for autonomy, negotiation and self-request.

SELECTED SOURCES

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- Lieberman, M. D. et al. (2007). Putting feelings into words: affect labeling disrupts amygdala activity. *Psychological Science*, 18(5), 421–428.
- International Focusing Institute. The Classic Six Steps. focusing.org/sixsteps
- Self-Determination Theory. Basic Psychological Needs. selfdeterminationtheory.org
- Center for Nonviolent Communication. Feelings & Needs Inventory. cnvc.org

This workbook is a companion to the full illustrated Focusing script. Use alongside supervision and within accredited training.
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