

Workbook Chapter Eighteen Feel and Express Your Feelings

Self-Assessment Tools:

HOW TO RECOVER YOUR FEELING FUNCTION

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Alice Miller in her book "For Their Own Good," lists possible experiences you might have had as a child related to your feelings:

1. Your feelings got hurt and nobody noticed. Or your feelings were laughed at, or punished.
2. You were forced to show gratitude towards those who hurt your feelings, because they had good intentions. (they told you they didn't mean to hurt your feelings).
3. You were told to forget everything that happened to you and any feelings connected to these things.
4. You were told not to feel what you were feeling, like not to feel and show your anger at others for hurting you.
5. You were not shown how to how to safely discharge your hurt feelings and instead you directed these feelings against yourself.
6. Your parents or other adults had trouble witnessing your temper tantrums and isolated you (Time out).
7. Your feelings brought up memories of what happened to them when they were a child and had a temper tantrum. They became emotionally dysregulated because of the effects of these memories.

She adds, "The greatest cruelty that can be inflicted on children is to refuse to let them express their angry and hurt feelings, except at the risk of losing their parents' love and affection."

For example, parents do not understand how to effectively handle temper tantrums. They use punishment, like isolation instead of having empathy and understanding that the child is discharging accumulated tension and frustration over trying to master life's daily challenges. Time in is the most effective way to handle temper tantrums. What the child needs most is to be close to their parent, get a hug and some acknowledgment of why they are feeling angry or hurt and get some calming reassurances.

Alice Miller says that you cannot grow up until you mourn your losses and suffering. This is your task as an adult, if you want to break your intergenerational family patterns.

Case Example:

I had a young man as a client, who had extreme social anxiety. In most social situations, he could not even speak. That told me that whatever trauma that is connected with what is a severe "freeze" response, must have happened very early in his life, perhaps even before he could actually speak. The Adrenal stress response, that is wired into all of us, is activated when we feel threatened. Even though the social situation posed no threat, they caused the feeling of being in some danger to surface and the ASR kicks in when he is in a social situation.

I tried through self-assessment tools to see if he had any memories of anything that could have happened during his first 9-12 months. He could not come up with any memories. I also asked him to ask his mother if anything might have scared him during this time of development. She could not remember anything.

So, I asked him to close his eyes and see if he could recall the feelings he has when he is in a social situation. When he said he was in touch with the feelings, I asked him if he had a name for his feelings. He replied, "I feel helpless and hopeless." Then I asked him to close his eyes again and tell me the earliest memory he had of feeling "helpless" and "hopeless."

He immediately, said, "I was about three years old and I was watching my parents engaged in a horrible fight. I felt helpless to do anything to stop them and I felt hopeless because this wasn't the first time they had fought this way." I then said, "You have just located the possible cause for you losing your voice in social situations."

By using the feeling he has in current social situations, he was able to recall a memory that connects perfectly with why he cannot speak in social situations. This was the break though I was hoping for. I then asked him to look at that situation and see what was missing from it that has kept it alive in his unconscious since that time.

He realized that he did not get comforted by either one of his parents. They did not even notice how terrified he was. He also could not speak and tell them how witnessing this fight made him feel. He had no voice to protect himself from the terror he felt.

My assignment for him involved getting comfort and support from his wife, who he trusted and practicing regaining his voice in social situations. He continues to make good progress in using both of these behaviors to finish what was left unfinished from his earlier experience.