

Sometimes feelings are monsters

























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Self management with feeling














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APPENDIX

Preface

Originally I didn't want to mention the current situation because this book was written long before the COVID 19 pandemic and will be useful beyond the pandemic. Yet, this challenging time dominates all of our thoughts and feelings so I decided to comment after all:

I think it could help us a lot right now if we used all our ingenuity, all our skills and experiences, to imagine and work towards a better future. To find people with whom we work together on developing ideas and solutions that make a difference. If you look closely you will see that this is already taking place in many areas. People are getting together in huge *hackathons*, because they want to contribute and others are going above and beyond their usual work expectations despite difficult conditions. They are helping neighbors, working on solutions to current problems ...

The most important message in my book is that we can influence what we feel, and that it is important to understand how our feelings work. Through this knowledge and its implementation we have influence over further evolution in our world. Basically my theory is that if each of us is in touch with their own feelings and focuses on what brings them joy, we will automatically become who we are meant to be. Because from a place of joy we are able to be productive and capable, we feel connected to people, nature, and the world, and treat each other mindfully and compassionately.

Berlin, January 6th 2021

What you will find in this book



What you'll find here are exercises to help you understand and read the connection between your feelings and your body, and to get to know your feelings so well that you know what triggered a feeling and what that means for you. I'll introduce techniques to help you make friends with the more difficult feelings, learn to accept them, and take them as signs that something that's happening isn't good for you. And then knowing how you would like to act. You will also find techniques that help you to perceive your positive feelings, to let them sink deep into your body and thereby find strength in your own perception. On this basis even the difficult feelings can be looked at – cautiously at first, then more courageously – and fully experienced without them having a negative effect on you or anyone else.

This is all part of *emotional intelligence*, one of the important basic skills for getting along with other people, whether at work, within a friendship or in a romantic relationship. Knowing and being able to regulate your emotions makes you more resilient to stress, more empathetic, and more successful in dealing with other people.



Have you ever experienced saying or doing things that you didn't really mean to say or do? How could this happen? What led to it? If you remember such a situation now, you already have your own *Gefühlsmonster situation*, namely a situation in which a feeling *invaded* you, *took possession of you*, before you could think and decide how you actually wanted to act.

Feelings are there to help us recognize what is good for us and learn to avoid what is not good for us. What sounds so simple is in fact providing pitfalls in practical life. Avoiding unpleasant situations, for example, can lead us to not accept challenges and keep us from developing further in important areas.

Emotions unfortunately also feel very threatening even through imagination. It is enough to imagine or remember a scary situation to clearly experience a quite frightening feeling. Fear, which is actually there to protect us from danger, can become excessive if we nurture it.

This is exactly what this book is about. It's about what can happen to us through feelings and how, if we want to and invest some time in exercises, we can have more influence over our feelings and actions.

There are also exercises that support you in developing a realistic view of both positive and negative events in your everyday life. In an effort to avoid negative situations our brains sometimes play tricks on us by shifting the emphasis too much to the negative situations. And you can learn to better distinguish *old* feelings from *new ones*. Please keep in mind that implementing these exercises requires you to participate yourself and get to know yourself better in the process. No one can do this for you.

The *emergency toolbox* is for emergency situations in which we want to quickly get out of tangled emotions and become able to act. The exercises are effective, easy to implement and with quick results. Here, too, practice brings an advantage, namely that the techniques work even faster and more intensely in an emergency.

To feel connected to your body is a necessity for all exercises. This will be talked about in many exercises. We notice feelings through small body signals like vascular constriction/coldness or vascular dilation/warmth. If we know our very individual signals it helps us to identify feelings within seconds.



Overview

1. **Feelings:** Basic information on dealing with feelings
2. **Food for thought:** How our brain works
3. **Limitations:** Inner critics, beliefs, and other things that make your life difficult
4. **Body exercises:** How you can use your body to get out of your thought carousel
5. **Personal Wellbeing:** Exercises that make your life easier
6. **Emergency toolbox:** Exercises for acute overload situations
7. **New ways:** Exercises that can initiate and confirm an inner change of mood
8. **Dealing with others:** Diversity issues

Please practice selfcare while reading this book. Old, challenging experiences tend to resurface when you are dealing with feelings on a deep level. Then it helps to consider what you need instead, whether it's a break, talking to a good friend, or psychological guidance. In general the question "*What do I need now?*" is the main question, an essential companion in order to be at home with yourself and to be able to feel joy.

Introduction

Why should we deal with our feelings when they sometimes cause us so much trouble? Maybe we can't escape sadness, hurt others with words or actions by a sudden outburst of anger, avoid situations that scare us ... This book is a plea to deal with your feelings, so that you recognize them, know how they feel, and learn to deal with them better and better during the course of your life.

Suppressing difficult feelings costs more energy than accepting them, and above all it has the disadvantage that we do not learn to deal with them. In the children's book "Ronja Räubertochter" (Ronja the Robber's Daughter), Ronja tells her father that she can't learn to deal with the harpies if she doesn't go into the forest. I read this book to my children and this sentence always helped me when I wanted to protect them too much instead of letting them take their own steps. It's kind of like that with the feelings we like to avoid: There's the fear of speaking in front of others that prevents us from learning and growing from new experiences; or the anger we hide from ourselves and then fear its force for the rest of our life. So we remain trapped in the effort to repress these feelings and have less energy to focus on the beautiful things in life.

Without feelings our experiences would have no meaning. Feelings help us to arrange our experience and to understand what is good for us and what is not good for us. They help us to feel connectedness and to feel pain when we feel excluded. According to Gerald Hüther our basic needs are autonomy and connectedness.



Dealing with these, and finding our own measure with them, is crucial for growing up healthy. Subsequently children who do not experience that their needs are considered, that their ideas are accepted, that their desires make a difference, do not learn the principle of self efficiency and are in danger of being too subordinate to others and they don't do – or even know – what is good for them.

Just like we have now learned to exercise our bodies regularly from childhood on into old age, the brain can also be trained. Feelings that you have already worked with, and which effects you recognize, will no longer appear as *monsters*, but as signs of something that you want to devote your attention to. The following theses have evolved from my work and research, and I would like to put them at the beginning of the book:

Basic theses

- Feelings are the language of our body and soul. Through mindfulness we can learn to understand them better.
- Simultaneously they easily get in our way and become *monster-like* if we don't recognize them. So they tempt us to say or do things we wouldn't have said or done in a calm state.
- Every experience is stored along with the feeling we experienced at that time.
- These feelings resurface during similar experiences or triggers and have more to do with ourselves than with our counterpart.
- Our thoughts generate our feelings.
- Feelings are contagious.

There are many different constellations of basic emotions by individual authors. With Paul Ekman⁹ the basic emotions are *sadness and despair, anger and rage, surprise and fear, and joy*. In the movie *Inside Out* they are *anger, disgust, joy, fear, and sadness*. Marshall Rosenberg¹⁰ looks at feelings we have *when our needs are met* and those *when our needs are not met*.

From the models I am familiar with, I find Vivian Dittmar's¹¹ list of the *varieties of feelings* the most helpful. So in the first chapter I present her *feelings as social forces (anger, sadness, fear, shame, joy)* to you.

9 Paul Ekman: *Reading Feelings*, Spektrum Taschenbuch, 2nd edition 2011

10 Marshall Rosenberg: *Gewaltfreie Kommunikation*, p. 57/58

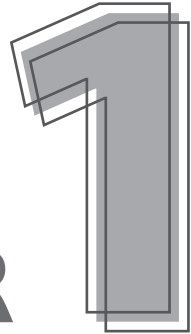
11 Vivian Dittmar: *Gefühle und Emotionen*, pp. 19-71



For the *Gefühlsmonsters* we have agreed on 25 feeling representations, based on the use of the cards and the user feedback. No descriptions are associated with these cards, because the application has shown that it is much more helpful for mutual understanding to find your own words when looking at the cards.

If you prefer other models of feelings I encourage you to look at the illustrations in this book without bias and take with you what is useful to you.

CHAPTER



Feelings

Either – Or

To begin with a little story:¹²

A young warrior asks an old shaman, “Can you tell me what is going on inside of us humans, in our inner life, in our soul?”

The old man replies, “This is how it works: We humans have two wolves inside of us. One represents all that is good: love, justice, compassion, forgiveness, peacefulness and so on, the other is all the evil in us: hatred, envy, greed, violence, vindictiveness, stone-heartedness ... These two wolves are constantly fighting within us.”

“So far so good, but who is winning the fight?”

The old man’s answer is, “It’s the wolf you feed that always wins!”



I’ve already tried that, it doesn’t work to always only feed the good stuff! you might reply. Yes, I’m familiar with that. It seems that sometimes the things that appear simple require more thought and discipline than we expect.

12 Ed Watzke: *Wahrscheinlich hat diese Geschichte gar nichts mit Ihnen zu tun*, Forum Verlag Godesberg 2008, back cover text



Exercise 1 (5 min)

Close your eyes and stop thinking for a minute. Yes, that's right: think nothing at all!

Well, how did that go? Not so good? Did you think of things you didn't want to think about? We notice that our brain keeps working even when we tell it to do nothing. Only Zen monks with years of practice manage to think nothing.

The good news are that our brain always processes only one action at a time, except when it works intuitively! That means that when we don't want to experience difficult thoughts, all we have to do is to think of something beautiful. For example, think of a place in nature that you love: a bench by the sea at sunset, a beautiful view in the mountains, a tree you like to sit under, a place where an enchanting encounter took place, or an impressive historical site. Picture one of the situations you experienced in detail. What did you see, hear, smell, feel there? Detect what changes in your body.

Well, how do you feel now? Can it be that for a moment you have forgotten challenging things that you were busy with before???

This is exactly what is supposed to happen! With a little practice you can manage to direct your thoughts to things that are pleasant, that give you strength instead of taking it away from you.

I'm sure you already knew all of this. What I've learned over time is that you have to recall this knowledge over and over again. It takes practice to permanently change the way you think.



Somatic markers

First of all, it is important to recognize our own feelings. For this we need our body, at this point the mind is not enough, it can easily play tricks on us.

How are you doing, right now, at this moment? How do you notice how you feel?

We perceive feelings physically, so we speak of *somatic*¹³ markers. Negative somatic markers, when it comes to difficult feelings and the corresponding changes in the body, or *positive somatic markers* when it comes to pleasant feelings and the corresponding body sensations with them.

Our emotional experience memory evaluates every situation according to whether it is liked or disliked, depending on previous experiences. According to Maja Storch¹⁴ this happens in 200 milliseconds, in contrast to the much slower evaluation system of the mind. The effects are small body reactions (the somatic markers), e.g. *a lump in the throat or a freeing feeling* that we can recognize if we are mindful. When it comes to important decisions it is always right to compare the results of the emotional experience memory with that of the mind.



13 Somatic means that which relates to the body; physical. Soma derives from the Greek soma to denote the body (Wikipedia.org)

14 Maja Storch: *Machen Sie doch, was Sie wollen!* p. 10ff

Attention: If you have a great dislike to the first part of the following exercise it may be that you are currently under too much stress or might even be already in a state of burnout. In that case please go straight on to the second part of the exercise and, when you get the chance, think about who can support you to feel better again.



Exercise part 1 (5 min)

Think of a difficult situation you have experienced in the past week: something you were embarrassed about, maybe you made a mistake or received some difficult news. No one will know about it, this is just for you right now. Now focus your attention on your body: What changes do you notice? They may be very subtle changes. Approach this exercise with a little spirit of inquiry.

How does it feel? If you were to describe it to a friend, what would you say? Describe what is happening in your body in your own words. Not *I was scared* or *That was terrible for me*, but something like *It's getting tight in my chest* or *I feel a heaviness* or something similar.

Take the time to make a brief note of it, because you are just discovering your negative somatic marker, very individually yours. Writing it down in your own words increases the likelihood that you will notice the emergence of difficult feelings more easily and earlier in everyday life.





Exercise part 2 (5 min)

Now, of course, we'll move on to the pleasant situations. Think about the most pleasant situation you experienced during the past week: a joyful message, a beautiful moment with someone you love, a funny situation with your pet, a personal sense of achievement, a delicious meal you prepared, meeting a neighbor, any small, pleasant situation you remember is suitable.

Go inward. How does it feel physically when you recall this situation exactly in your mind's eye once again, feeling it again in your imagination? Where were you, who else was there, what did it look like around you? Were there smells or a sound? Did someone say something nice to you? Take your time, enjoy it!

What changes in your body compared to the first part of the exercise?

If you take notes here as well it will be increasingly easier to notice pleasant moments in your everyday life and to get into a state of mind that allows your brain to work optimally.



Find an image for yourself that serves as an anchor to connect with happy and content feelings.

► Read more in Chapter 5, Strengthening Portfolio.