

# Tune in to Your Emotions

Emotions are part of every day life, and most of us have noticed the ups and downs accompanying our varying emotions. Although positive feelings, such as joy, excitement, and love are often welcomed, we tend to struggle with the more unpleasant feelings, such as sadness, hurt, anger, and fear. We tend to view them as “weak,” “bad,” or even “dangerous.” Consequently, we may actively avoid them, trying to race back to the more pleasant feelings.

There are good reasons for our dislike of these unpleasant feelings. Many people grew up in families where they received negative messages when experiencing some of these feelings. Additionally, certain vulnerable feelings such as sadness or hurt might have been viewed as a weakness. Naturally, as a child, you would have absorbed these messages and developed negative reactions to some of these feelings.

The surprising news is that even these difficult emotions can be quite helpful, if we listen to them. All of our emotions have been *wired in* for survival and difficult feelings serve to signal that something is not going as planned. Healthy anger, for example, may tell us that our goals have been frustrated, we have been treated unfairly, or that our boundaries have been invaded. Sadness may reflect loss, and hurt feelings may

***Our emotions have been wired in for survival.***

reflect experiences of rejection or abandonment. Finally, fear typically reflects a real or perceived threat. By *attending* to these feelings, we can listen to what we need to do for ourselves and are then *primed* to act in a certain way - attending to healthy anger may lead to asserting one's boundaries, attending to fear may result in avoiding a potentially

dangerous situation, and attending to sadness and hurt may lead one to retreat in order to heal or, when expressed, result in receiving comfort from others.



Deborah Kors, Ph.D.  
Registered Psychologist

However, we normally don't just impulsively react to each feeling that we experience or we would wind up in some difficult situations. Rather, we use our higher cognitive processes to first identify what it is that we are feeling, followed by what we want to do with the feeling and whether it is in our best interest to express that feeling. Identifying feelings is complicated in that people are often in touch with their *reaction* to their emotion and not the actual underlying emotion. For example, in our society, men have frequently been taught to not show vulnerability. Consequently, they may act and feel angry, while underneath they are feeling afraid or ashamed. Additionally, people may have vulnerable feelings of hurt and sadness that are masked by an outward expression of anger or even rage.

One of the toughest parts of working with difficult emotions is learning how to regulate our experience and expression of them. Shutting them down and avoiding them rarely works, because inevitably feelings come back or we wind up cut off from much of our life experience. The opposite extreme, feeling consumed by the emotion is also not healthy, as people can feel completely overwhelmed by their emotions. Therefore, finding the balance is essential.

To access emotions that have been avoided or buried, one can talk, write, or even draw about a difficult situation to access feelings that are associated with that situation. Watching a movie which evokes similar feelings that have been avoided may be also useful. Further, focusing inwardly on specific body sensations (e.g., tight shoulders, heaviness in the chest area) often brings up buried feelings.

When emotions are too overwhelming, one of the best ways to regulate them is to get some working

distance from them by labeling what one is feeling and even writing about the feeling. Reflecting on the emotion in this way allows one to make more sense of the experience or even see it from a different perspective. Seeking comfort from others also can help soothe painful emotions, thereby decreasing their intensity. Other ways to regulate overwhelming emotions include deep breathing, relaxation exercises, using peaceful imagery, distracting oneself with an enjoyable activity, or even seeking humor.

Finally, letting go of shame about your emotions is important. Try to feel compassionate towards yourself for having them, as you would towards a friend. After all, emotions are an important part of our human existence. ♠

DENIS  
**BOYD &**  
associates  
PSYCHOLOGISTS & COUNSELLORS

**Denis E. Boyd & Associates Inc.**  
202-1046 Austin Avenue  
Coquitlam, BC V3K 3P3  
Tel: 604-931-7211 Fax: 604-931-7288  
Email: info@denisboyd.com  
Web Site: www.denisboyd.com

Denis Boyd, M.A., R.Psych. \* 00399  
Tena Colton, Psy.D., R.Psych., Ltd.Reg. 01722  
Rick Hancock, Psy.D., R.Psych. 01494  
Don Lasell, M.A., R.C.C. \*\*  
Nancy Michel, M.A., R.Psych. 00477  
Joan Schultz, Ph.D., R.Psych., Ltd.Reg. 01724

Intern  
Erika Bardal, M.A. Cand.

Affiliated Therapists  
Jean-Claude Bazinet, M.A., R.C.C.  
Maureen Chapman, M.A., R.C.C.  
Nancy deVries, M.A., R.C.C.  
Simon Hearn, Ph.D., R.Psych. 01194  
Deborah Kors, Ph.D., R.Psych. 01465  
Alivia Maric, Ph.D., R.Psych. 01044  
Jean Toth, Ph.D., R.Psych. 01081

Note: \* R.Psych. (Registered Psychologist)  
\*\*R.C.C. (Registered Clinical Counsellor)

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DENIS  
**BOYD &**  
associates  
PSYCHOLOGISTS & COUNSELLORS

202 - 1046 Austin Avenue  
Coquitlam, BC V3K 3P3  
Phone: 604-931-7211  
Web Site: www.denisboyd.com

## It's So Unfair!

When we see two people who are angry with each other, we often find that their argument is about feelings of injustice on a personal level. One or possibly both will become angry because they feel they have been treated unfairly by the other. Each wants justice; it's part of their human nature. In their minds they believe that if they could just set the record straight or get the other to change their behavior then all will be well and good. Unfortunately, this fight to balance the scales of justice frequently leads to further hurt and unhappiness.



Rick Hancock, Psy.D.  
Registered Psychologist

Sharon is a stay-at-home mom looking after her two young children and managing the household affairs. Her husband, Nick, runs his own small

construction company and has to work long hours to please his clients and manage his workers. He frequently works six or seven days a week. Sharon has come to resent Nick not being available for her and the kids. She sees him making his job a priority and his freedom to meet a client for a beer after work as being unfair and an abuse of his “freedom”. Nick is tired of being criticized when his primary goal is to provide for his family and secure their financial future.

Both Sharon and Nick believe they are being treated unfairly. Sharon believes that her efforts to convince Nick to spend more time with her and the kids fall on deaf ears. He always has so

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## Get More Out of Life

Do you want more out of life, something different, a new way of doing things and yet you do not have a clear idea of how to bring this about? Perhaps you have tried everything you can think of but things are not improving. You may be feeling overwhelmed by the events in your life. You may have experienced a catastrophe, loss or trauma (recent or buried in the past) and your coping skills have been stretched to the limit.

Have you considered speaking to a counsellor? It's a way of building on assets you already possess. Courage, openness, clearly defined goals, accepting personal responsibility, hope, belief that things can change and a support system are some of the assets that you can bring to counselling or learn during the counselling process.

It takes a great deal of **courage** to approach a stranger and ask for help. It takes courage to try new strategies and courage to be willing to make mistakes, evaluate what has happened, make adjustments and move on. It takes **openness** to discuss problems; listen to new ideas; try new behaviours; think about yourself and your life in new ways.

Knowing where you want to go is an important part of ensuring your arrival. You may start off with general **goals** such as wanting more out of life, wanting someone to change, wanting to be happy, wanting to be a better parent or wanting a better marriage; perhaps you may not have any goals in

mind at all. Your counsellor will ask you questions that will help you understand how you will be behaving and thinking differently when you reach your goals. When you begin with the end result clearly stated and understood, the way to move forward becomes clearer and helps ensure that the results of counselling are what you really want.

In order to effect changes in your life, it is necessary to **accept personal responsibility** for bringing about those changes. When you wait for circumstances or another person to change, you adopt a “victim” stance. Accepting personal



Tena Colton, Psy.D.  
Registered Psychologist

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## It's So Unfair! (continued from front cover)

many excuses for spending time on work-related matters. He seems to view her stress and concerns as petty annoyances that he is unwilling or powerless to address. Sharon feels ignored, unappreciated, and, essentially, abandoned.

Nick does not particularly enjoy the long hours and the difficulties in dealing with unreasonable clients and unmotivated workers. But he sees this as the price he must pay to get ahead and give his wife and kids the best life possible. When he gets home after a long day at work he is devoid of energy and, more than anything, wants to be left alone. Sharon typically complains about his long hours and lack of help with the kids. Many days he wonders why he even bothers coming home. He generally feels criticized, unappreciated, and attacked.

Needless to say, these individuals each feel their partner is being grossly unfair. The result is numerous conflicts as each expresses their hurt and frustration in an effort to seek justice. And if we analyse these conflicts closely we find that the themes of Sharon feeling "abandoned" and Nick feeling "attacked" appear time and again. Without finding a way to communicate more effectively, this relationship may not survive this stressful

time in their marriage.

In therapy Sharon may be asked to describe what she does when she feels abandoned. She might concede she gets angry at Nick, criticizes his long hours away from the family, and accuses him of being an absent husband and father. In addition, she tries to impress upon him the difficulties of her operating as a "single parent", and she withdraws her affection.

Likewise, Nick would describe what he does when he feels attacked. He would relate that he shuts down, withdraws, refuses to discuss Sharon's complaints for fear of creating a conflict, and he finds reasons to come home later than necessary.

Both would be asked if their response to feeling abandoned and attacked respectively is helping to improve the situation. The answer, of course, is no. And both would be shown how their behavior fosters the strong negative feelings that each experiences. Only now can we focus on individual changes in behavior.

There will be a wide variety of more appropriate behaviors they could each adopt. In this scenario Sharon may agree it is more helpful to greet Nick warmly when he gets home, ask about his day, and save her own frustrations for a later time.

### Retirement Planning Conference/ Alaska Cruise

If you believe that to be good at anything you need to practice, why not practice retirement? The Retirement Planning Association of Canada presents its 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference aboard Celebrity Cruise Lines cruise ship 'Mercury' - destination - Alaska! The cruise departs from Vancouver on May 18, 2008 and returns May 25.

The majority of the Conference, featuring such speakers as Journalist Arthur Black, Psychologist Denis Boyd, Dr. Terry Colton and Dr. Jim Lane, will take place while at sea so you won't miss any of the exciting ports of call - Ketchikan, Juneau, and the Hubbard Glacier to name a few. What a great opportunity to hear from the professionals about the lifestyle planning side of retirement, and what a great venue!

The theme of the Conference is: "Sex, Drugs and Rock 'n Roll - Changing Perspectives in Retirement". Remember the 60's? If you were there, how could you forget! The children of the 60's are now turning 60 and their perspectives around issues of intimacy, sexuality, pharmaceuticals, health care, and the ups and downs of life have changed dramatically. How will you cope with the changes? Join us on this unique Conference/Cruise and learn what's ahead. Practice and plan now for your 'golden years'!

For more information, go to: [www.andreaguiler.cruiseshipcenters.ca/promotions.aspx](http://www.andreaguiler.cruiseshipcenters.ca/promotions.aspx)  
See you on board!

Terry Colton, Ph.D., RPAC Conference Chair

In turn, Nick could show appreciation for all Sharon does during the day, offer to help put the kids to bed, listen more attentively to her concerns, and make more effort to increase his time at home. In addition, this couple would benefit from a daily "talk time" and setting aside a weekly time when they can be alone together without the kids.

Sharon and Nick undoubtedly love one another but their search for justice has clouded their ability to listen to one another. Once they admit to their individual roles in each conflict and understand how they can interrupt the negative pattern that leads to conflict they are on the road to a more open and healthy relationship. ♣

### Parenting Workshop

For Parents of Children 0-18 yrs.  
(Systematic Training for Effective Parenting)

Presented by  
Don Lasell, M.A.  
Registered Clinical Counsellor

Sat., January 19 & 26, 2008  
10:00am - 4:00pm

Cost: \$100.00/person,  
\$125.00/couple

### Marriage Workshop

"What is a Great Marriage?"  
How to revitalize your relationship.

Presented by  
Denis Boyd, M.A.  
Registered Psychologist

Mon., February 11, 2008  
7:00pm - 10:00pm

Cost: \$30.00/person,  
\$50.00/couple

Please call the office at 604-931-7211  
to register for one of these workshops.

# Self Reflection: A Life Long Journey

As a therapist, I am consistently reminded of my clients' courage when they strive to pursue the goal of making positive changes in their lives. At times, we discover that how we see ourselves and how others see us are not always in sync. We may find that some areas we perceived as strengths can actually disable our growth and the growth of others, for example, in caretaking others' needs, we may lose sight of what we need to remain healthy, and in turn, end up enabling those we care about to become dependent on us to solve their issues.

At other times, areas that we perceive as weakness can prove to be our greatest strength; for example, a life filled with hardship can create compassion and guidance to those whose life has also been filled with sorrow. We judge ourselves as strong or weak, good or bad, and lose sight of the fact that the human condition is imperfect. It is OK to have flaws and it is perfectly natural to acknowledge our strengths. Self examination is a life long journey. We can close our eyes to our pain and never move beyond a life of self recrimination or of blaming others. On the contrary, we can see change as an exciting challenge to meet head on.



Maureen Chapman, M.A.  
Registered Clinical  
Counsellor

Clients may come in with disturbed relationships, anger, anxiety, depression or addiction struggles but find it difficult to articulate why they are experiencing various symptoms. It may be worthwhile to take an inventory of the questions below to see if any apply to your current situation.

Have I grieved what needs to be grieved?

Have I ignored my good qualities and the fact I am resilient?

Where did I come from and where am I going?

How do I make peace with the past?

How do I forgive myself and others for past wrongs?

What are my strengths?

What is personally meaningful for me?

What are my beliefs?

What are my convictions, morals, and values?

What are my goals?

What are my boundaries or do I even know what they are?

Do I nurture myself and give to those around me?

Do I have a sense of faith or a belief in a higher power?

Do I engage in negative self talk or see the world through angry eyes?

Do I hate without knowing why I hate?

Do I abuse myself or others?

Do I believe I must always be right or perfect?

Do I believe the world owes me?

Do I see myself as a victim, a survivor, or a thriver?

Once we are aware that any of these above issues have stalled our growth we can move towards making changes to benefit our life and, in turn, those around us. People who previously saw themselves as victims can become empowered once recognizing that despite victimization they are in fact survivors. As survivors, we may develop the will to grow and expand our awareness of self and others.

The path to healing allows us to draw on our past experiences and appreciate the strengths and wisdom we have gained, while also encouraging those who suffer to address their life challenges. It stands to reason that when you help yourself you inevitably become more empowered to give understanding, compassion and wisdom to those around you. One person can impact a multitude of people. We just want to make sure that our impact is enriching. Therapy is designed to assist individuals with many of the above issues. If you or a loved one is experiencing any of the above difficulties, please feel free to contact our office. ♣

## Get More Out of Life

responsibility for discovering how you can change your life and implementing those discoveries removes you from a "victim" stance to a stance which is proactive and empowered.

When life is tough, **hope** helps you believe that somewhere there are answers that will stop the pain and help you to obtain the life you desire. You may believe that it is only desperation that drives you to seek help. Yet, the fact that you are considering reaching out speaks to the fact that you have not given up, that you are still willing to try at least one more thing.

**Belief**, like hope, can be faint when you approach your first session. As counselling progresses, you will develop the belief that you will be able to

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effectively use your newly obtained knowledge to bring about the changes you desire.

Lack of a **support system** can be a major drawback to success. Counselling will provide support and can be the first step in building a strong support system. Belonging to a support group helps you to begin to lose your sense of isolation. It can be a great encouragement to realize that others share the same burden, but survive and move on in life. Belonging to a church, athletic association, social group, or volunteer organization can also provide support. I usually discourage the use of the internet for finding support. There are just too many pitfalls and landmines!

Counselling helps you to modify behaviours and attitudes, find solutions, develop skills, and access your inner resources in order to move toward your chosen goals. If you believe that the

**...stop the pain... obtain  
the life you desire...**

therapist understands your problems and has the skills to help, and you are ready to build on your personal resources, counselling will probably have a very successful outcome. ♣