Understanding and Expressing Feelings

What are feelings?

Feelings (emotions) are inner experiences of mood. They can be pleasant or unpleasant, mild or strong. You can keep them to yourself or share with others. Feelings can also a rapid heartbeat, shakiness, or sweaty palms. Emotions can push human beings toward action.

Most human feelings fall into one of these groups:

- Happy: joyful, delighted, pleased
- Sad: hopeless, upset, sorry
- Angry: hateful, irritated, annoyed
- Scared: terrified, fearful, anxious
- Confused: stunned, hesitant, torn

Other important human emotions that may not fall into these main groups are sexual feelings, guilt, shame, loyalty, and forgiveness.

How much feeling is "normal?"

All human beings have feelings. Some people have intense feelings and must struggle to control them, while others have to work hard even to know what their feelings are.

Sometimes you may not be aware of what is causing strong feelings. You may think you are overreacting to something. It may help to discuss strong feelings with someone who cares about you. What looks like an overreaction may actually make emotional, rather than logical, sense.

You can help friends or family understand their feelings by helping them put their emotions into words. With someone who is crying and grieving a loss, for example, it can be much more helpful to say, "You are feeling sad because you miss her so much", than to say, "Don't cry."

How do people deal with feelings?

You may have trouble identifying how they feel. Many feelings can be mixed together. Having too many feelings you can't separate, such as sadness mixed with anger, can cause "feeling overload". Strong feelings push human beings toward action. If you are angry at being cut off by another driver in heavy traffic, for example, you can act (run into the other car), or think (say to yourself, "He certainly is in a hurry," or, "I am not going to let my anger get out of control today"). Thoughts can be used to control how you express your feelings.

If you are very logical, you may not be aware of your own feelings. You may use thoughts and ideas to hide your feelings, sometimes without even realizing that you are doing so. You may be afraid that if you show your feelings, you will lose control.

Some people use unhealthy ways to deal with feelings, such as overeating, using drugs or alcohol, or smoking. Just because you do not express your feelings does not mean that the feelings go away.

When you feel stressed, your body releases chemicals into the blood. If you feel stressed for a long time, the chemicals continue to build up. This raises your blood pressure and makes your heart work harder. This kind of stress can affect your physical and mental health. Many office visits to healthcare providers are for conditions related to stress.

In order to deal with feelings, you need to learn:
·   How to identify what your feelings are
·   How to accept feelings as normal and healthy
·   How to manage stress in healthy ways
·   How to talk about your feelings
·   How to act appropriately on your feelings

Why are feelings important?

Feelings help make you who you are. No one can take your feelings away from you, and when you understand them, you can use your feelings to guide your actions. Get to know your feelings to help you understand yourself and others better.

Developed by RelayHealth.

This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.