

# Feel It, Heal It

Making space for emotions without letting them take over: acknowledge what is present, understand what it may be communicating, and choose a response that supports you.

## Feelings are information

Emotions are part of the way human beings respond to experience. They can signal loss, threat, unfairness, connection, disappointment, unmet needs, joy, relief or change. Difficult feelings are not proof that you are failing, and pleasant feelings are not the only sign that you are healing.

The phrase 'feel it, heal it' does not mean that simply feeling an emotion cures everything. Healing is often slower and more complex. It may involve safety, relationships, boundaries, grief, therapy, medical care, practical change and time. The useful idea is that repeatedly avoiding or suppressing our internal experience can make it harder to understand what needs attention.

## Acknowledge before you act

- **Name:** What is the closest word for what I am feeling?
- **Locate:** Where do I notice it in my body?
- **Allow:** Can this feeling be present for a moment without immediately fighting it?
- **Understand:** What happened before this feeling arrived? What might it be responding to?
- **Need:** Does this emotion point towards rest, safety, expression, reassurance, information, connection or a boundary?
- **Choose:** What action would support me rather than simply discharge the feeling?

## Carl Rogers: acceptance creates room for change

Person-centred therapy does not begin by telling a person what they ought to feel. Rogers emphasised acceptance, empathic understanding and congruence - conditions that can make it safer to explore experience rather than hide it.

*"The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change." - Carl R. Rogers, On Becoming a Person (1961).*

Acceptance is not resignation. You can accept that anger is present without acting aggressively; accept sadness without deciding life will always feel this way; or acknowledge anxiety while still choosing a meaningful next step.

## What might emotions be communicating?

- **Anger:** something may feel unfair, intrusive, threatening or outside your limits.
- **Anxiety:** your system may be anticipating danger, uncertainty, judgement or loss of control.
- **Sadness:** you may be processing loss, disappointment, loneliness or something that mattered.
- **Guilt:** you may believe you have acted against your values - or you may have learned to feel guilty whenever you prioritise yourself.
- **Shame:** the message can feel like 'I am wrong' rather than 'something went wrong'; shame often needs compassion and safe connection.
- **Jealousy:** it may reveal longing, insecurity, fear of losing connection or something you value.
- **Relief:** notice what changed. Relief can teach you what was costing you.
- **Joy:** allow yourself to notice what nourishes you rather than treating positive emotion as unimportant.

# Process Without Becoming Overwhelmed

## Feeling is not the same as flooding

There is a difference between making space for emotion and becoming completely overwhelmed by it. If an emotion is too intense to process safely, regulation may need to come first. You can return to the meaning later. Pacing is particularly important with trauma, grief and experiences that trigger dissociation, panic or shutdown.

## Try a 'little and often' approach

- Notice the emotion for a short period rather than forcing yourself into a long exploration.
- Keep some attention on the present environment: the chair beneath you, sounds around you, the date and where you are.
- Use movement, warmth, pressure, fresh air or sensory tools if they help your body feel more settled.
- Write three sentences rather than three pages.
- Talk to a trusted person and agree that you do not need advice - perhaps you only need to be heard.
- Stop if you are becoming more dysregulated rather than more connected to yourself.

## Emotional avoidance can be understandable

People may avoid feelings through overworking, scrolling, alcohol, food restriction or overeating, spending, staying constantly busy, intellectualising, people-pleasing, sleeping, withdrawing or trying to solve everybody else's problems. These strategies often developed because they worked in some way: they distracted, numbed, protected or created control. Curiosity is more useful than shame.

## Ask: what job is this coping strategy doing?

If you understand the function, you can build alternatives. If scrolling gives your mind an escape, you may need genuine decompression. If alcohol quietens anxiety, the underlying need may be regulation or relief. If people-pleasing protects against rejection, the work may involve safety, self-worth and boundaries rather than simply 'saying no more often'.

## Neurodivergence and emotion

ADHD and autistic people may experience emotions intensely, notice them late, struggle to label them, or become overloaded when emotional and sensory demands combine. Alexithymia can make 'How do you feel?' a surprisingly difficult question. Start with observable information: Is my chest tight? Am I talking faster? Do I want to escape? Has noise become unbearable? Am I suddenly unable to make decisions?

A visual or numerical system may be easier than emotion words. You might use colours, a 0-10 intensity scale, body diagrams, emoji cards or a short list of common states. The aim is not perfect labelling; it is enough awareness to respond.

## The 90-second pause

- Stop adding new demands for a moment.
- Notice three physical sensations.
- Name one emotion or simply say 'something is activated'.
- Rate intensity from 0-10.
- Ask whether you need to process now or regulate first.
- Choose one small action that will not make tomorrow harder.

## When emotion points to a boundary

Sometimes healing is not about becoming better at tolerating a situation. The feeling may be telling you that something needs to change. Repeated dread before a particular interaction, resentment after saying yes, exhaustion after masking or anxiety around unpredictable demands can all be useful patterns to explore.

# Your Feel It, Heal It Toolkit

## Emotion mapping worksheet

| Prompt                          | Your notes |
|---------------------------------|------------|
| What happened?                  | _____      |
| What did I feel?                | _____      |
| Where did I feel it in my body? | _____      |
| What thoughts appeared?         | _____      |
| What did I want to do?          | _____      |
| What might I need?              | _____      |
| What response would support me? | _____      |

## Build an emotional first-aid menu

- When I need grounding: \_\_\_\_\_
- When I need expression: \_\_\_\_\_
- When I need comfort: \_\_\_\_\_
- When I need connection: \_\_\_\_\_
- When I need a boundary: \_\_\_\_\_
- When I need professional support: \_\_\_\_\_

## Reflect - do not interrogate yourself

Reflection is different from rumination. Reflection tends to create understanding or choice; rumination circles the same question without movement. If you notice yourself repeatedly asking 'Why am I like this?' try a kinder, more specific question: 'What happened?', 'What was I needing?', 'What would help now?' or 'What can I learn for next time?'

## Healing can include action

Processing emotions is not only an internal exercise. Sometimes the healing response is practical: apologise, ask a question, rest, leave an unsafe situation, seek treatment, change a workload, repair a relationship, grieve a loss, make a complaint, create distance or accept that something cannot be changed and needs to be mourned.

## Signs you may need more support

- Emotions feel unmanageable most days or interfere significantly with daily life.
- You are frequently dissociating, panicking, shutting down or unable to function.
- You are relying increasingly on alcohol, substances or other harmful coping behaviours.
- Trauma memories, nightmares or intrusive experiences are persistent.
- Low mood, hopelessness or anxiety is continuing or worsening.
- You are harming yourself, feel unable to keep yourself safe, or have thoughts of suicide.

## If you are at immediate risk

Seek urgent help. In the UK, call 999 or attend A&E; in an emergency. For urgent mental-health support, use your local NHS urgent mental-health route or NHS 111 where appropriate. You do not need to manage a crisis alone.

## Weekly reflection

- Which emotion visited most often this week?
- What seemed to trigger or intensify it?
- What helped me stay with it safely?
- What did I avoid, and what might that avoidance have been protecting me from?
- Did any emotion reveal an unmet need or boundary?
- What gave me relief, connection or joy?
- What do I want to carry forward into next week?

# A Message From Maggie, Books & Resources

## A message from Maggie

Many of us were never taught what to do with feelings. We may have learned to hide them, minimise them, apologise for them or wait until they became so strong that they came out in ways we did not intend. That does not mean you are bad at emotions. It may mean you have been coping with the tools you had.

For me, 'feel it, heal it' is not about sitting inside pain forever. It is about giving yourself enough permission to notice what is true. What am I feeling? What happened? What is this asking me to pay attention to? Do I need comfort, change, a boundary, a conversation, professional help - or simply some time?

You do not have to turn every emotion into a lesson. Sometimes sadness is sadness. Sometimes you are tired. Sometimes something hurts because it mattered. The goal is not to become endlessly calm; it is to develop a relationship with yourself in which your feelings can be heard without having to control everything you do.

Healing can be quiet. It can be noticing sooner, recovering more gently, choosing a different response once, asking for help, or realising that you no longer need to abandon yourself to keep everyone else comfortable.

## Recommended reading

**Carl R. Rogers - *On Becoming a Person*.** A foundational person-centred exploration of acceptance, congruence and growth.

**Russ Harris - *The Happiness Trap*.** ACT-based ideas for making room for difficult internal experiences while choosing actions guided by values.

**Marc Brackett - *Permission to Feel*.** An accessible exploration of recognising, understanding, labelling, expressing and regulating emotion.

**Bessel van der Kolk - *The Body Keeps the Score*.** A widely known trauma text; some readers may find parts intense, so it may be best approached with care.

## Further resources

Depending on what you are experiencing, support may include your GP, NHS talking therapies or mental-health services, a qualified counsellor or psychotherapist, trauma-informed support, bereavement services, neurodivergent-affirming practitioners, occupational health or specialist alcohol/substance services. Coaching can support reflection and practical change but is not a substitute for clinical treatment when treatment is needed.

## Clinical notes & references

Rogers, C. R. (1961). *On Becoming a Person*. Houghton Mifflin. • Harris, R. (2019). *The Happiness Trap*, 2nd ed. • Brackett, M. (2019). *Permission to Feel*. • NICE guidance on depression, anxiety, PTSD and related conditions should be consulted where clinically relevant. Emotional processing should be paced carefully where trauma, dissociation or significant risk is present.

**Important:** This resource is for coaching reflection and psychoeducation. It does not diagnose a condition or replace individual medical, psychological or emergency care.

**Space to Breathe Therapy - Maggie's Coaching**