The Feeling Dictionary

Emotions

♠ Intervention

(-) 5-30 min

Client

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Emotional intelligence represents the ability to process, use, understand, and manage emotional information effectively (Matthews, Zeidner, & Roberts, 2002). Individuals who score high on emotional intelligence may be better able to handle the stress of everyday life, to foster a greater number of meaningful close relationships, and to be more socially competent in general (Zeidner et al., 2009). Consequently, highly emotionally intelligent individuals may also experience higher levels of well-being or "optimal psychological functioning and experience" (Ryan & Deci, 2001, p. 142).

Emotional awareness has been argued to be the skill most fundamental to emotional intelligence (Lane, 2000). Emotional awareness refers to the ability to identify and describe one's own emotions and those of other people (Lane & Schwartz, 1987). Past research has shown that emotional awareness is associated with other areas of emotional functioning, such as the ability to recognize and categorize emotional stimuli (Lane, 2000; Lane et al., 1996). This tool aims to increase the client's level of emotional awareness.



Goal

The goal of this exercise is to increase the client's level of emotional awareness. The client is invited to define feelings or emotions in terms of the thoughts that usually accompany them.



Advice

- This exercise is invaluable for gaining more clarity about upsetting thoughts, especially when clients feel upset but do not know exactly why.
- Rather than just completing this exercise once, clients should practice describing their thoughts and feelings regularly to increase emotional awareness.
- This exercise can also be very valuable for clients who struggle to communicate their feelings. A pre-requisite for effective, emotionally honest communication is the ability to identify one's emotions and feelings. However, for some clients, being able to name and share their feelings is a difficult skill. This exercise can be a valuable first step in helping clients share their emotions and feelings.

- A powerful way to structurally implement this exercise is by using an experience sampling technique. Experience sampling requires the client to complete the exercise at either random or fixed moments each day. For example, clients may use their phone to set a timer. When the timer goes off, the client should record the emotions he/she is feeling at that moment. By reviewing this record of emotions at the end of each day, the client gains insight into how his/her emotions flowed during the day.
- Clients can be advised to keep the writing and reflect on it later. This reflection can help the client gain a clear "meta" view on his/her emotional states even more.
- Many clients are hesitant to write for fear of others discovering, reading, and judging their writing. You can inform clients to feel free to dispose of their writings after they have written the day's entry. No one else needs to see what they have written. The process of self-expression is beneficial even if the text is immediately destroyed. Still, discussing the writing with a coach may be of tremendous value to expand and deepen one's understanding of thoughts and feelings.
- This exercise can be combined with (brief) mindfulness exercises. For instance, doing a short meditation, like the "3-minute breathing space," before engaging in the exercise can help the client get more in touch with his/her present feelings and emotions.

References

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The Feeling Dictionary

Instructions

Feelings and emotions go along with particular thoughts. For example, when you feel sad, you may be thinking, "my future is hopeless." If you feel angry, you may be thinking, "things should go my way."

In this exercise, you are invited to create a personal "feeling dictionary." This dictionary defines your feelings in terms of the specific thoughts that accompany and cause these feelings. Creating this dictionary can help you identify upsetting thoughts you are having when you feel bad but don't know why.

In the appendix on p. 5, an example of a feeling dictionary is displayed.

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First, identify a feeling you are having. If you find it difficult to put your feeling into words, try to write dow	۷r
physical symptoms of your feeling, like a racing heart, shortness in breath, dullness in thinking, etc.	

Write this feeling down:	

Step 2: Identify thoughts

Then write down any thoughts listed under that feeling that you are having. "What is the story that you are telling yourself at this moment?

Step 3: Review

Review or add more thoughts to the Feeling Dictionary whenever you feel upset. The more you become aware of the specific thoughts that are associated with your emotions, the easier it will be to deal with them. Appendix: An example of a Feeling Dictionary

Anger - Frustration - Irritation thoughts

- Life should be fair and give me the things I need to be happy and fulfilled.
- I cannot stand it when I don't get what I want or "deserve."
- I believe it means that I am a failure if I don't get what I want or "deserve."
- I have difficulties accepting the wrong situation.
- I believe things must be different than they are.
- If I don't get my way now, I cannot stand it.
- I cannot stand inconveniences, hassles, or frustrations.
- People should act fairly and behave the way I want them to.
- If people disagree with me, criticize my ideas, or don't do what I want them to, my happiness and selfesteem are threatened.
- I have the right to get mad if people who frustrate me are no good and should be punished.
- It's worth my time to do the punishing, and it's in my best interest to vent my rage or to get revenge!
- I refuse to consider seeing things from your point of view because I am right, and you are wrong / Other people should see things the way I do and act accordingly.

Anxiety - Worry - Restless - Fear thoughts

- I cannot stand being anxious or upset.
- I have the idea that something terrible is going to happen.
- Besides, I can imagine only the worst happening in this situation.
- A catastrophe will ruin my life.
- I don't see a solution, no way to prevent, and no way to cope with this problem.
- I won't be able to get on with my life and will never find happiness. I will be devastated forever.
- I will not thrive if something bad happens or if things change.
- Most of the time, I worry about potential problems, to prevent bad things from happening.

Bored thoughts

- I feel there is nothing to do that is worthwhile or fun.
- I feel like waiting around most of my time, waiting for life, or waiting for something interesting to happen.

Depression - Sadness - Grief - Hopelessness thoughts

- In my opinion, the future is hopeless, and there is nothing I can do to make it better.
- Something important to me is lost forever.
- I will never find happiness because life is a burden.
- I don't see any prospect for a joyous, content, or fulfilled life.
- I don't feel like there is a place for me in this world.
- As a person, I'm inadequate, bad, and weak.
- I am a loser and a failure because I made mistakes before.
- I cannot handle any of my responsibilities because I am too confused and overwhelmed.
- I cannot stand it when I get frustrated.
- I think I am a loser for not handling my frustration better.
- I should be more successful and happier.
- I can only accept myself if everybody loves me, and I am successful in their eyes.
- If I fail at a task or if you disapprove of me, I am worthless.

Disgust thoughts

- People should not do the things I view as terrible, bad, shocking, hateful, repulsive, or gross.
- People who do these things are bad or repulsive.
- When I see someone doing something I find repulsive, I cannot accept it.
- You should not do something I cannot stand or hate.
- This makes you a bad person.

Envy thoughts

- Someone else has something that I want and "deserve."
- If I don't have this "something," I will feel resentful towards someone who has.

Guilt

- My moral code is violated by how I behave.
- I deserve to be punished because I did this on purpose.
- I should be punished and suffer forever for anything wrong or immoral that I did.
- Making a mistake or hurting someone else makes me a bad person, no-good person.
- For this reason, I am a worthless no-good person, and the world knows it.

Shame

- If other people found out, they will think that I am a worthless person and they will be right.
- I keep my mistakes a secret, so no one ever knows about them.

Jealous

- Other people have "things" I want, and I cannot stand it.
- Not having the "thing" you have makes me fearful, miserable, and deprived.
- If I have "something" you have too, I experience anxiety over losing it while you get to keep it.

Loneliness

- I am an inadequate, unlovable person since I'm alone.
- Love and support of others is something I want and must have.
- I cannot live without, and I am less of a person if I don't have love, support, and friendship.
- Being alone is something I cannot stand
- The only thing I can do is wait for the right person (or persons) to come along to take away my loneliness and to make me feel whole again.