

Troubling Feelings

1. Managing “troubling” feelings (e.g., angry, disappointed, frustrated, lonely, afraid, sad, betrayed, unimportant, unfair, inadequate, insecure, resentful, hurt) is a daily challenge for each of us. **Most of the time we cope with troubling feelings by keeping them to ourselves (a.k.a., “stuffing”, “biting our tongue”, “sucking it up”), which fails to bring relief, rather builds up pressure over time resulting in an eruption/explosion of emotion or illness (physical or emotional).**
2. Troubling feelings are created (triggered) by others’ words and actions (or lack of words or inaction) and by circumstances (e.g., election results, health, stock market, terrorist attack, weather). **We never choose to feel troubled, rather it is a natural (automatic) reaction to some triggering spoken word, action or event.**
3. Rarely (if ever) do we intentionally seek to hurt others’ feelings, especially those who we love most in this world, such as our spouse/significant other/partner, child, parent, etc. **Our words and actions are unintentionally troubling to others.**
4. While we can generally tell when someone we love is feeling troubled by “reading” their body language, we cannot know which specific “flavor” of troubled they are feeling, nor the particular triggering word, action or circumstance associated with that troubled feeling. **None of us are mind readers, able to determine with any degree of specificity or certainty what exactly is troubling our spouse, child, parent, etc.; rather, the only way to know is for our spouse, child, parent, etc. to share with us how they are feeling and what triggered that feeling.**
5. Alcohol and drugs are often used to relieve the pain of troubling feelings. **A healthier, more effective method for managing troubling feelings is to share those feelings with a caring, supportive person in one’s life using the 3 steps approach summarized below:**

3 Steps

1. **Share** trigger (word spoken, action, circumstance) first, followed by troubling feeling.
 - a. For example, “When you leave your dirty plate on the counter, I feel subservient.”
 - b. Starting with the trigger, and ending with the resulting troubling feeling, will help the person listening to feel **MUCH** less defensive than if you were to reverse the order (e.g., “I feel subservient when you leave your dirty plate on the counter.”)
 - c. Sharing focused (ending with) your troubled feeling(s) generally leads down the path of better understanding, rather than focused on (ending with) the other’s word/action or circumstance which tends to lead to an argument due to the other feeling the need to defend his/her actions or lack of control over the circumstances.
2. **Respond** in a caring, supportive manner by...
 - a. *Listening* – repeating back what was shared, asking if heard correctly (which helps both “connect the dots” between the trigger and troubling feeling).
 - b. *Empathy* – imagining “stepping into the shoes” of the person sharing, for 30-60 seconds, imagining what he/she was thinking and how he/she was feeling (like an actor placing him/herself into the role of some other character/role).
 - c. *Remorse* – genuine expression of regret (or apology, if applicable) that the sharing person is feeling (or felt) that specific flavor of troubled as a result of the triggering word/action or circumstance.
3. **Problem-solve** together to decide what each of you individually and together is going to do to help the one who shared to feel better moving forward.
 - a. Negotiation addressing problem of troubling feeling
 - b. May include involvement/participation of 3rd party (e.g., child, parent, teacher, relative, doctor, counselor)
 - c. Often people attempt to start here, at this 3rd step, skipping over or fast-forwarding through steps 1 & 2 (identifying the problem troubling feeling & bringing both closer together through empathy)