



Newsletter from the Open Grove

*branches of well-being,
rooted in healthy living*

forward thinking, interactive media

Hello from the Open Grove! Summer is such a wonderful time of the year. Nothing's better than spending time in the dappled shade of our favorite grove! The roses are in full bloom. The koi are growing in our pond. The bees are busily making honey. It's time for a hammock, some lemonade and a nice afternoon nap in the warm breeze under the trees.

This month's Open Grove Newsletter takes a look at your emotions. What are emotions? Why do we feel some emotions for a long time while others seem fleeting? How do we resolve painful emotions? We will strive to answer all of these questions and others as we take a look at emotions.

What are emotions?

Oddly, there is little research into the biology of emotions. People often believe that emotions are a psychological phenomena rather than a biological phenomena. Biochemist Candice Pert, Ph.D., spoke of the peptides (small chemicals) of emotion in her book The Molecules of Emotions (1999, Simon & Schuster). She further relates that these peptides have receptor sites throughout the body including the heart. The brain also responds to emotion. Using the latest brain scan technology (fMRI, PET and SPECT), neurobiologists have been able to map emotion on the brain. When we feel a particular emotion, certain areas of the brain light up. Scientists now believe that emotions originate in the brain.

Emotion seems to be the body's response to external and/or internal stimulation. There are truly only 4 emotions – fear, anger, sadness, and happiness. Other emotional descriptive words such as “frustration” describe either an increase or a decrease in intensity in on of the four emotions. Shame, on the other hand, is a blocking or stopping of all emotion so is not technically an emotion.

Chinese medicine theory states that emotions are connected to energy meridians or channels that run throughout the body. Very simply, the Liver Meridian, for example, is responsible for anger. Too much liver energy causes increased anger or irritability. Too much Urinary Bladder energy causes an increase in fear. Emotions that linger (“I am always angry”) reflect a meridian or energy that is out of balance. Balance can be restored by acupuncture or shiatsu (acupressure).

Those emotional people...

While everyone feels emotion, some people feel emotions more strongly. The Myers Briggs Indicator separates people into “feeling” people and “thinking” people. Feeling people tend to feel their way through situations. They might say, “This doesn't feel good” or “I like the feel of this office” whereas a thinking person might say, “That doesn't make sense” or “This office is in a great location”.

Feeling people tend to be creative, artistic people. They tend to show their emotions readily so they are quick to laugh and to cry. Feeling people are often told they should “grow up” or “get a grip” when they express themselves. Yet their rich feelings create a more colorful and creative world.

Energy in motion

Emotions are sometimes called “**Energy in motion**”. Nancy Napier often uses the metaphor that emotions are like storm clouds in an otherwise blue sky. The sky is still blue even through the darkest of storms. We are the unchanging sky. The emotions flow through us and past us.

Sometimes we deny our emotions. We might find a feeling unacceptable so we simply deny that we feel it. These emotions are pushed into our unconscious or shadow. Contrary to our wishes, these emotions come out when we least expect it. For example, we might be angry with our boss, but too afraid that he might fire us so we push this emotion away. This anger will still come out in the form of snide comments or impatience. Our anger might even embarrass us by over-responding to a situation.

An important step toward mental health is learning to accept your emotions. All human beings have emotions. Try to learn that there aren't "bad" emotions and "good" emotions. Learning to accept your emotions allows you to begin to work with your emotions and learn more about yourself.

Stuffing, denying or pushing away your emotions will not make them go away; neither will drinking or smoking over your emotions. Emotions need to be metabolized or processed. The only way to process an emotion is to feel it. Find a safe nurturing environment and allow yourself the luxury of feeling. You won't regret it.

"I can't stop crying"

Sometimes our emotions get in the way of our functioning in the world. We cry so much that people don't trust us at work. We are so angry that people begin to avoid us. We become so afraid that we don't want to leave the house. We are so emotional that people don't bring up important issues for fear of "hurting" us. While we don't want to ignore our feelings, it can be damaging to our personal and professional lives to express our emotions in unsafe and unreceptive settings. Here are a few suggestions to help you contain your feelings until you have the time and space to process them.

1. Tell yourself to "stop" If you feel anxious, worried or fearful, interrupt the flow of these thoughts by telling yourself to "stop". This behavioral technique will stop your habitual worry or anxiety. It even works for self-loathing or self-pity. Try it!
2. Write in a journal. Keeping a journal is a wonderful way to get to know yourself. Starting the practice of writing can be the best gift you could possibly give yourself. When you are really upset, writing in a journal can be a wonderful way to move the emotion. However, sometimes the open-ended, freeform journal writing can be too overwhelming when we are really upset. This is a time to practice more structure techniques such as outlining a problem or diagramming.
3. Visit and Acupuncturist Feel overloaded with emotions? Make an appointment with an acupuncturist. A good acupuncturist will open your meridians and move the energy. The process takes about an hour. You may need to make a few appointments if you are working with a long standing issue.
4. Create a Box. Take a moment to create a magical box. This box lives somewhere in the world and contains all of the memories and emotions you are not able to process at this time. Be sure to create an opening where items can go in, but nothing can go out (such as a library shoot or a vacuum hose). Remember to create a lock for your box.
5. Talk with a Good Friend. Sometimes just knowing someone cares and is listening can really help. Find a friend to talk to. Create a safe place where you can talk and your friend can listen. You might want to warn your friend ("Hey, I really need to vent tonight") before you start. Even talking on the telephone with someone who cares can make a huge difference.
6. Spend time with your pet. Recent studies have shown that spending 15 minutes stroking a pet reduces stress hormones in humans and in pets. Spend some time tonight with your pet. Tell it your problems. You'll be surprised at how much better you will feel!

7. Exercise. Aerobic exercise is one of the sure ways to move emotions. Whatever you are feeling, take it along with you as you walk, ride a bike, or run. The rhythmic movement of aerobic exercise and the deep breathing bring sure relief from intense emotions. Weight training can be almost meditative if you allow yourself to take a break from your problems and simply focus on the movement of each individual muscle. You will increase the benefits of your workout as well as give yourself a reprieve from your strong emotions.
8. Write an unsent letter. This is a wonderful “I-am-angry-with-my-boss-but-have-to-be-in-his-office-in-10-minutes” technique. Write a letter to your boss telling him every single thing you think about him. Don’t leave anything out. Really let him have it. When you are done, start over. Continue this process until you feel relieved of these emotions. Make sure to shred or burn the letters. They are for your eyes only.
9. Put yourself on pause. The kids are screaming, the dog is barking, dinner is burning, and your anxiety and frustration is rising. Rather than yelling at the kids or locking yourself in the bathroom, practice the sacred art of the “pause”. “Putting yourself on pause” means simply turning off dinner, taking a deep breath, and imagining yourself in a nice quiet nurturing environment. Take another breath. Allow yourself at least 5 deep breathes before you engage back into your life. You will be amazed at the difference it makes.
10. Set a time limit. Sometimes it feels like we will never stop hurting. This is a time to give yourself a little structure to allow the feelings to move, yet not feel overwhelmed with feeling. Tell yourself that you will cry for 5 minutes, then get up and do something else at the end of those 5 minutes. Over time, you will feel relieved of these pent up emotions.

With practice, you will find that these easy to use strategies become habitual. Try one today!

“I feel numb”

Some people truly feel numb or don’t feel emotions. Often these people have experienced something so intense that their emotional system becomes overloaded. This overload can last for decades after a traumatic, life threatening or intense emotional experience. The problem is that the intense emotions of fear and anger block other feelings of joy and happiness.

The key to feeling again is to create a safe, stable environment where it’s all right to feel. You can create this in the context of your primary relationship, with a support group such as Alanon or in a therapeutic relationship. Tell your story of these intense experiences. You might have to tell them more than once to actually begin to attach feelings to these experiences. Go slow. Moving to quickly toward your emotions can lead to overload again.

There’s no question that this is hard and scary. Give yourself some time. Many people say that when they started feeling their emotions is when they first realized that they were alive. Feeling is worth it.

Real Self Care for Real People

As a part of our Real Self Care program, we will publish a 1-5 minute retreat from 20-minute retreats by Dr. Rachel Harris. These retreats are short and easily fit into your daily life. Feel free to check out the Real Self Care 2004 section of our bulletin board (www.opengrove.com/bulletinboard/) for more retreats and other ideas about real self care for real people.

“Anxiety is probably the most common psychological problem that interferes with personal peace. We all have anxiety, some of us more than others. Psychologically, the questions we should ask ourselves regularly are: Does our anxiety interfere with our daily functioning? Do we avoid

certain situations because we are afraid of becoming anxious? Spiritually, anxiety makes it difficult to find peace in solitude. We tend to become fearful rather than peaceful.

This retreat uses emotional drawings to give you an opportunity to express your inner experience of anxiety outwardly in a creative way. You can symbolically pour your anxiety into your drawing, and then you have the chance to look at it with objectivity. This process helps you gain a sense of control over your anxiety. You can begin to learn how to deal with these feelings instead of avoiding them and in so doing giving them greater control over your actions.

Step 1: Entering into Retreat: Sit comfortably with your oil pastels and paper at hand. Take a full five minutes to remember a time when you felt anxious. Really re-create that experience so you can feel it in your body. Does your heart rate increase? Do your muscles tighten? Do your hands get sweaty? Allow your unique experience of anxiety to become very real to you.

Step 2: Do an emotional drawing that represents your experience of anxiety. You want to be able to look at your drawing when it's done and say, "Yes, that's what it feels like inside me when I get anxious." Use a full ten minutes to complete your emotional drawing.

Step 3: Returning to the World: For the remaining five minutes, prop your drawing up so it's directly in front of your eyes. Focus on your drawing as if you've never seen it before, and at the same time, become aware of your breathing. Notice details in your drawing and let your breathing gently become slower and deeper. This is the time for you to breathe peacefully in the presence of your anxiety.

--From [20 Minute Retreats](#) by Rachel Harris, Ph.D. Reprinted with permission.

News in the Grove –

- [Heart of the Grove update!](#) In the last week, we have sent out our "Save the Date" postcards for the Heart of the Grove Gala (November 13, 2004). We just received the gorgeous sample of the invitation to enter from [McClain Finlon](#). Watch your mail box! If you don't receive an invitation, and would like to, email us at: submit@opengrove.com. We are only sending out 350 invitations to enter this year. Check out last year's entries at: www.heartofthegrove.com.
- [We have a few people nominated for our Real Self Care Heroes!](#) We received a number of nominations last month and will post our next interview at the end of the month in our "Anger" Audio Magazine. If you know of someone who leads a busy life that includes self care, email Claudia at: claudia@opengrove.com. Make sure to put "Real Self Care Hero" in the subject line!
- [Change in the bulletin board.](#) You can now "subscribe" to a bulletin board thread. You will be emailed when someone updates the tread. It's a great way to keep informed about Real Self Care or any of the Open Grove General Forums. You must be a member to subscribe.
- [Want to support the Open Grove?](#) Here's a few ways that won't impact your wallet. The Open Grove is a member of EScrip. Sign up at: www.escrip.com and register the Open Grove as a recipient. A portion of your grocery bill will be donated to the Open Grove from the grocery store. Another easy way is to sign up at www.igive.com/opengrove and designate the Open Grove. The Open Grove will receive up to 27% of your on-line purchase from your favorite vendors. Simple ways that will make a big difference at the Open Grove and ensure the Open Grove continues as an independent forum for your holistic health and well-being.
- [Amy's Voices returns!](#) Amy Astorga's "Voices" segment returns in this month's Anger Audio Magazine. Stop and talk to her about your anger!

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