



Family Caregivers of British Columbia

Untangling All Those Emotions: Whose Feelings are Whose?

In this handout you will learn some valuable skills to simplify and clarify the emotional experience of family caregiving.

Who do these feelings belong to? Are they yours? Somebody else's?

Please stay with this awhile as what you are experiencing and feeling will be quite uniquely yours and not that of somebody else. The trick is to discern this all the time. All feelings are experienced in the body. Though you might have sympathy for another's situation, this does not mean that their feelings are yours. Empathy of course is an ability to put yourself in another's shoes or situation while taking on their perspective and leaving behind yours. (Difficult and ultimately very empowering.)

You might find yourself saying things like "I know exactly what you are feeling" or "You must be feeling X" or "I'm confused" or "I'm overwhelmed." I want you to learn that there are some useful bits and pieces of information here that will help you disentangle these experiences. So, it may be laborious, however I am going to take each example separately and clarify.

I know exactly what you are feeling...

Well that would be nice wouldn't it? However it is not accurate enough. You might have an idea. You might have a notion however what you are experiencing are your feelings not someone else's. The hint here is to listen and not assume that "you get it." Ask things like "tell me more" and "have you felt this before" or "what would help you the most right now?"

You must be feeling "X"...

Well in this situation you are making a huge assumption and that stops you listening to the other person. So again, you are experiencing your feelings not someone else's. Reread the suggestions above.

I'm confused...

This is invaluable for you; this is your feeling. At the most basic what it does it alert you that you might be attempting to make things fit which simply don't. Yes, read this one more time. When a person attempts to make sense out of something and it doesn't, it usually is because the premise, foundation, or assumption doesn't fit with the experience. Now the trick here is to take in what you are seeing and take the behaviour as being indicative of the assumption. This can be very very tricky as interpretations of behaviours are usually misleading. So, hold yourself back from interpreting and simply notice the behaviour and use this as an illustration of the value that is held. Avoid relying on words if you can. As when words and behaviours don't match a person might feel confused rather than realizing that the behaviour is what is to be believed. (Difficult isn't it?)

I'm overwhelmed...

Slow down as your abilities at this stage are virtually nil to be able to understand whose feelings are whose. However, this feeling of being overwhelmed is distinctly yours and does need to be addressed.

It is helpful to know that people always experience thoughts, feelings, and sensations simply because we are human. Feelings do not need to be acted upon however it helps to simply and compassionately acknowledge them.

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