

## Positive Actions for Negative Feelings in Relationships

Negative feelings are an unavoidable by-product of life. It isn't possible to live in community with others, sharing the ups and downs of life without experiencing feelings of hurt, anger, frustration and disappointment. Part of love is exposing ourselves to pain. *What is possible, though, is to use these negative feelings as an impetus toward friendship and intimacy rather than as a destructive force.*

When you are upset, take the time to write it down. It is important that you sort through and identify your feelings first before you share them with the other person. Writing your feelings helps you to clarify them. It assists you in releasing, and helps you to bring yourself back to a place of calm. You need to be at a certain level of calm in order to be able to approach the other person in a healthy way rather than in anger. Writing can help you get your feelings out where you can decide what to do with them in a helpful way. It also allows you to sort out what you do and don't have responsibility for.

Though angry feelings often provoke a confrontation, writing our feelings allows us to share them as a confession. A confession simply means that we are saying what is true from the heart. When we speak from reason or intellect, we are more likely to communicate from a right / wrong or legal perspective. This will often generate a defensive response. When we reveal our heart, compassion is possible and the response of the other can be generated out of love rather than agreement.

In his book What You Feel You Can Heal, John Gray suggests the Love Letter Technique as a tool for dealing with negative feelings in relationship. This love letter allows you to work through your feelings before you present them to the other person. The steps are applicable both for romantic and non-romantic relationships.

## How to write a “love letter”

1. First of all, express feelings of **anger** and **frustration**.
2. Next, write about your feelings of **hurt** and **sadness**.
3. Now, share your feelings of **fear** and **anxiety**.
4. Feelings of **regret** and **remorse** come next.
5. Finally, as you are ending your letter, communicate your **love**, **commitment** and **desire** to your partner.

Here are some things to remember as you are writing your letter:

Stay away from “always” and “never”. Don’t blame. Use statements such as “I feel \_\_\_\_\_ when you \_\_\_\_\_,” or “When you do **x** in situation **y**, I feel **z**.” Stay away from judgments, e.g. “You are the worst husband/wife who ever lived.” No name calling, psychologizing – “I know you are like this because of your childhood,” or low blows – “You are just like your mother/father.”

Powerful feelings can be expressed in a respectful way. Always seek to speak the truth in love. Remember that the most important relationships generate the strongest feelings.

After you have written the letter, you may wish to leave it for the other person to read. It is best that they be calm and receptive. You may wish to approach the person and ask to share what you have written verbally. If he/she resists, ask for a time when you can talk. Be GENTLY persistent. Let them know that you aren’t claiming to be “right” but that it is important to you to be honest and you want to share what is going on with you.

The purpose of sharing your feelings is to enhance closeness; it is NOT to manipulate or control. Often, truly understanding the views, needs and feelings of the other person will lead to a shift in our own attitudes, feelings and behaviors.

Other points to keep in mind:

- You do not need to agree on everything. It is OK to have differing opinions.
- Even the facts are not that important when we are attempting to understand someone else's experience. Experience has a subjective quality to it. Two people can experience the same event and process it very differently. Neither experience is "right" or "wrong".
- Avoid judging or feeling superior. We all have blind spots.

Once you have shared your heart, release your feelings to God and give the other person time to process what you have written. Be patient. Transformation takes time.

See also "Difficult Conversations" on the Resources page under Documents.