

WORKSHEET 8 · CHAPTER EIGHT · FEEL WHAT YOU FEEL

Feel What's Underneath

The emotion we notice first isn't always the emotion we're actually feeling.

One of the most important things I learned in my own healing — and one I've taught my therapy clients for years — is that the emotion we notice first isn't always the emotion we're actually feeling.

Anger, anxiety, irritability, numbness and frustration are often **secondary emotions**. They serve a protective purpose, helping us survive overwhelming experiences. But they can also keep us from recognizing the deeper emotions our hearts are trying to express.

This exercise will help you move beyond those first reactions to identify what's underneath. You don't need to judge them, fix them, or make them disappear. Simply noticing them is often where healing begins.

STEP 1

Notice What Shows Up First

Start with what's loud, immediate, and hard to ignore.

What am I feeling right now?

What is coming out — anger, anxiety, frustration, guilt?

These are often secondary emotions — the protective layer. For example: "I'm so angry right now." "I feel anxious and on edge."

STEP 2

Get Curious, Not Critical

Instead of judging the reaction, pause and ask:

What might be underneath this?

If this feeling could speak, what would it say?

Shift from *“Why am I like this?”*
to *“What is this trying to show me?”*

STEP 3

Name the Primary Emotion

Look beneath the surface for the quieter, more vulnerable truth. Common primary emotions include:

- Fear
- Grief
- Sadness
- Loneliness
- Hurt
- Loss
- Uncertainty
- Hope

For example:

Anger **Fear**

Frustration **Grief**

Anxiety **Fear of loss, or of lack of control**

Naming it won't fix it. But it will clarify it.

What is the primary emotion underneath?

STEP 4

Say It Honestly

Practice expressing the deeper emotion — first to yourself, then to others if needed.

Instead of:

“What were you thinking?!”

Try:

“I was scared.”

“That really hurt.”

“I feel overwhelmed, and I don't know what to do.”

Healing begins not in control, but in truth.

How could I say it honestly?

STEP 5

FEEL with Compassion

Once you identify the primary emotion, let yourself FEEL it.

FEEL — Freely Experience Emotion with Love

- Freely experience the emotion — let it come, fill your body, and acknowledge what it feels like.

- **Do it with love** — place a hand on your chest, tell yourself it will be alright, and let yourself be there in that moment, knowing you can handle it.
- **Afterwards, do something nice for yourself** as a reward.

Healing is not about eliminating the feeling. It's about staying with it long enough to understand it.

REFLECTION

The Emotion Beneath the Emotion

Think of a recent moment when you felt overwhelmed.

What was my immediate reaction?

What might have been underneath it?

What did I actually need in that moment?

How might I better FEEL the underlying emotion next time?

A Gentle Reminder

It's not easy to identify and allow feelings to exist in your body, but it is essential to healing.

Go slowly. Give yourself grace. There's no timeline for these exercises. Simply do them as you feel the need, or as they feel helpful.

This worksheet accompanies Chapter Eight of *Reluctant Warrior: A Memoir & Breast Cancer Emotional Survival Guide* by Dr. Christina Hibbert. It is a reflective exercise, not therapy or medical care. If it brings up more than you expected, that makes sense — please consider bringing it to someone who can sit with you in it.