

## THE FOCUSING STEPS

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This is an experiential presentation, in several steps, of the inward act of Focusing on a felt sense. If you need information about what Focusing is, see my discussion entitled, “Introducing Focusing” on this website. Focusing on a felt sense is something best learned with someone who already knows focusing. But many have found they can learn it from written focusing instructions, and those who learn it with other focusers find it helps to have written material. I will assume you don’t know about the inner act of focusing, so I am going to teach it to you first by mapping the experience of something you know about onto an experiencing of something you don’t yet know about, but soon will. This will make the actual steps of the focusing processes more easily graspable. That, at least, is the hope. Every focusing trainer teaches the process in a manner that is unique to their own nature and experiencing, so if what I say here isn’t helpful, check out some of the other Focusing Steps examples at the [Focusing.org](http://Focusing.org) website.

Also at the end there is a little discussion of how Focusing can become as fundamental heart-centering practice

### Pre-step: Turning Attention Inward

Take a deep breath and relax. It is good to take a little time and bring your awareness inside your body. You might begin with feeling your extremities (feet and hands] and moving towards the central parts of your body such as your chest and abdomen. As you scan each part notice any tensions and feel free to adjust yourself so you are more comfortable. Finally you bring your attention to rest in the middle of your body.

Signal me or your focusing partner when you are ready for the next step.

### Step 1. Checking in with Yourself

Now you can check in with yourself and ask “How’s it all going right now?” Don’t answer right away. Give your body time to form an answer. It won’t come in words, at least not at first. It will

be like that murky feeling tone of a dream you just awakened from, but forgot what it was about. Notice that kind of feeling as it forms in the middle of your body. Give it a little time, 30 seconds or more, usually something will come. Don't go into it, just welcome it and be with it for a little while.

Signal me, or your focusing partner when you are ready for the next step.

## Step 2 Taking an Inventory

Now ask: "What stands between me and feeling fine right now?" Let whatever comes up come, but do not go inside it yet. Often there are several things, so greet each one as it comes, be with it a moment, acknowledge its presence in a friendly, regardless of what it is, and then set it down a little distance away from you, as if you just set it down on the table. Then ask, "Is there anything else in the way?" Continue in this manner until there is nothing else between you and feeling fine. Now you have them all laid out in front of you, not too close, there's a little distance. You have created a little space between you and them.

## Step 3 Selecting the Issue or Problem

From what came you have any number of items spread out before you. Let yourself notice which one captures your attention to you, the one that draws your attention most, or seems to have more energy to it. If you have any trouble doing this, then simply ask "Which one needs the most attention right now?" Select one thing, but do not go into it yet.

Signal me, or your focusing partner when have selected.

## Step 4 Letting the Felt Sense of the Issue Form

Don't try to analyze it or think about it. Get a felt sense of all about this problem. "What is the whole feel of this problem?" keeping your attention in the middle of your body, sense into the whole feel of the problem, and give the felt sense plenty of time to form. There are no words for it, just let yourself sense the issue freshly.

[Comment: If words or thoughts come at this step, we will only impose old habits of mind on the problem. What we want is a fresh or new perspective, and new forward steps. This will come first in a felt sense.]

### Step 5 Getting a Handle and Checking Against

Keeping close to the felt sense of it, find a word or phrase or metaphor that can serve as a handle to help you grab hold of it, and re-check it as many times as needed. The word you are searching for kind must fit or match the concreteness of the felt sense, so check inwardly and if it confirms it, then keep it, and if not, keep searching until a word comes that the felt sense likes. When the right word or phrase comes, there is a felt-shift that accompanies it, sort of like saying "Ahhh! Yeah, that's it!"

[Comment' Once you have this word or phrase, you can more easily keep a hold on the felt sense, which is handy because you can go back and check it out anytime you want. Sometimes this word will change because the felt sense changes a bit and brings a more exact word. In some cases what comes is not a word, but a gesture, or movement, or sound, or some other nonverbal form of expression. A dancer might be looking for a certain kind of movement, for example, or a composer searching for just the right chord progression or riff.]

### Step 6 Asking for the Crux

Now that we have a hold of the felt sense of the problem [or issue] we are going to ask some kind of crucial question, such as asking for the crux of it or the worst of it. There a list of several kinds of questions [below this instruction] and you can choose the one that fits your situation best, but do not answer it with your head. Let the answer come from the organismic intelligence and wisdom of your felt sense of it.

What is the crux of this issue?

What's the main thing about it?

What's the worst of it?

What makes it feel so bad?

Welcome what comes, even if it is difficult or unpleasant. Keep it company awhile and approach it with some empathy. Listen to it and try to see things from its perspective. You can check back with it to see if you got it right.

[Comment; at this point focusing is like a dialogue between you and the felt sense, or better yet, like a relationship in which there is a problem, and you are trying to listen carefully, make sure you got how it is for the other right, and then proceeding to search together for a way forward, or a solution...but seeking a way forward is the next step.]

### Step 7 Asking for a Way Forward

Having welcomed, listened to its perspective, and kept it company a bit, you can now ask it what it feels is needed or help move things forward. Don't answer for it, but ask, and wait for it to come from it. Here are some ways of asking for this:

What does this feeling need in order to feel better?

[Remember not to answer for it, but let it open up and suggest what's needed]

What would feel like a good small step in the right direction?

What action would make it feel better?

What would it feel like if it was all ok?

What's in the way of that?

### Step 8 Receiving What Came

Whatever came in this round of focusing, welcome it with gratitude. Usually one round is but a step on a solid path to a resolution or significant change, or new development. So now you can ask your body if it wants another round of focusing, or if this is a good stopping place.

[Comment: You can do more rounds whenever it feels right. Now that you know where it is and what it wants, you can set it aside and attend to other affairs of living. You can always come back and work on the problem or issue more, because you have a handle [that word or phrase] and can go back to that felt sense of it, and explore or dialogue with it in this fashion some more.]

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## REFERENCES

### Note on Focusing as a Heart-centered Practice

Focusing is a potent practice that can produce creative change in many arenas of life. Like introspection and empathy, it is a value neutral tool and could potentially be used to violate your core values and essential nature, or those of others. We've all had the experience of people who use psychology out of a motivation to manipulate us. BUT, when Focusing is used to find and live from your core of aliveness, and helps you identify core life issues, and helps you find and remove what is in the way of living from your core, it becomes a solid heart practice. Focusing is in fact the experiential root of the development of the concepts in heart theory, and is also a vital element of most of the heart psychology practices. Heart-based Focusing inquiries into who you are in your most natural and authentic sense, and into what it is you most deeply want in life, into what is your ultimate Vision or Purpose in Life, into what brings you alive, and so on. Heart psychology uses Focusing in a solid way to help you check your impulses and actions against your core of aliveness, and your core life issues and purposes. It has developed a number of experiential steps and questions that help you find your own core of aliveness, and live, think, plan, and act from it. [See fyp, oyh, and JFH/GZ on this website for more information.]

### To Learn More about Focusing

Visit the Focusing Institute website [www.focusing.org](http://www.focusing.org)

You can find many discussions and free presentations about focusing, its applications, and the 100 research studies supporting it. Focusing has major contributions and applications psychotherapy into creativity and the arts, writing, body work therapies, spirituality, business and education.

You can also find the following books, and many others, and order them through the Focusing Institute website:

Eugene T. Gendlin. Focusing, Bantam Books, 1981 [available in 12 languages].

Gendlin. Focusing Oriented Psychotherapy, Guilford Press, 1996.

Ann Weiser Cornell. The Power of Focusing, New Harbinger Publications, 1996.

Sondra Perl. Felt Sense: Writing with the Body. Boynton Cook. 2004.

### Research Basis of Focusing

If you are interested in the more than 100 research studies on Focusing and its applications, I recommend you begin with Marion Hendriks large article reviewing 89 of those studies, and offering a large research bibliography.

Marion N Hendricks. Focusing-Oriented/Experiential Psychotherapy. [A Review of more than 80 studies on Focusing and Experiencing Level.] In Cain, David and Seeman, Jules (eds) Humanistic Psychotherapy: Handbook of Research and Practice, American Psychological Association, 2001. Also: [http://www.focusing.org/research\\_basis.html](http://www.focusing.org/research_basis.html)