

LEARNING TO NOTICE FEELINGS IN THE BODY

**A gentle workbook for
people who find emotions
hard to feel or name**

phildrysdale.com

CONTENTS:

Getting Started

Before you begin.....	1
What is interoception.....	2
Pace yourself / if you feel overwhelmed.....	3

Exercises

1. Noticing the body.....	4-5
2. Body, Feeling, Thought.....	6-7
3. Staying with a feeling briefly.....	8-10
4. Using images instead of analysis.....	11-13
5. What might this feeling need?.....	14-15
Between session practice.....	16
Weekly reflection.....	17

Wrapping Up

A wee reminder.....	18
About me.....	19

Before You Begin

Many people find it easier to think about feelings than to actually feel them.

If you come from a high-control religious background, you may have been taught to distrust your feelings, override your body, confess every thought, or search for the “right” answer inside yourself.

You might be good at explaining your emotions, understanding where they come from, or working out why you feel a certain way. That can be useful. But sometimes thinking becomes a way of keeping a little distance from the feeling itself.

This workbook is about gently practising a different skill, learning to:

- noticing what is happening inside your body,
- naming feelings softly,
- and learning that emotions can be felt without needing to be solved straight away.

You do not need to do this perfectly.

Small moments of noticing are enough.

If you notice nothing, numbness, blankness, or “I don’t know”, that still counts as noticing.

You do not need to find the “right” answer.

This is not a test of emotional intelligence, healing, or how well you are doing.

You are in charge of how you use this workbook. You can pause, skip, adapt, repeat, or stop.

This resource is educational and is not a substitute for therapy, medical care, or crisis support.

What is Interoception?

Interoception is your ability to notice signals from inside your body.

These might include:

- hunger
- thirst
- tiredness
- pain
- heaviness
- butterflies in the stomach
- a tight chest
- a lump in the throat
- tension
- warmth
- numbness
- restlessness

Interoception helps us recognise emotions because, for many people, feelings show up in the body before they have words for them.

For example:

Body signal	Possible feeling
Tight chest	anxiety, sadness, fear
Warm face	shame, embarrassment, anger
Heavy body	sadness, tiredness, overwhelm
Clenched jaw	stress, anger, holding back
Fluttery stomach	fear, excitement, uncertainty
Numbness	shutdown, protection, overwhelm

These are only examples. Your body may speak in its own way.

The aim is not to force yourself to feel more.

The aim is to gently learn your own signals.

Important: Body signals can also be affected by hunger, tiredness, pain, medication, illness, hormones, sensory overload, or stress. The aim is not to decide perfectly what something means, but to become gently curious.

Pace Yourself

When working with feelings, it is usually better to go slowly.

Touch into the feeling.

Do not dive into it.

You are not trying to make yourself overwhelmed. You are building emotional awareness in small, manageable steps.

Signs it may be too much include feeling panicky, frozen, detached, dizzy, unreal, very young, numb, or unable to stay connected to the room.

If an exercise feels too much, pause. You can come back to it another time. You can also skip any exercise completely.

Signs it may be too much include feeling panicky, frozen, detached, dizzy, unreal, very young, numb, or unable to stay connected to the room.

If You Feel Overwhelmed

Stop the exercise and return to the present moment.

You could try:

- looking around and naming five things you can see
- feeling your feet on the floor
- holding a warm drink or textured object
- saying your name, where you are, and one thing that is true right now
- noticing the chair or sofa supporting you
- listening for three sounds in the room
- doing something ordinary, like washing your hands or making tea

You are allowed to stop.

Stopping is not failure.

It is part of learning how to pace yourself.

1. Noticing the Body

Aim

To begin noticing body sensations without needing to explain them.

Exercise: Body First, Story Later

Sometimes the mind wants to quickly explain what is happening:

- “I know why I feel like this.”
- “This probably comes from...”
- “It makes sense because...”
- “I need to work this out.”

This exercise helps you pause before going into analysis.

Step 1: Pause

Say to yourself: Before I understand it, I can notice it.

Step 2: Notice your body

Ask yourself:

- Where do I notice something in or around my body?
 - This might be inside your body, or where your body touches the chair, floor, clothes, or air.
 - If you notice nothing, numbness, blankness, or confusion, write that down. That is still information.
- Is it in my chest, throat, stomach, head, shoulders, hands, or somewhere else?
- Is it tight, heavy, warm, numb, buzzy, hollow, sharp, soft, restless, or something else?
- Does it stay still or move?
- Is it pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral?
- How strong is it from 0–10? (If numbers do not help, you can use words like low, medium, high, or too much.)

Step 3: Gently return

If your mind starts explaining, say:

I can come back to the story later.
For now, I am noticing the sensation.

1. Noticing the Body (cont.)

it's OK not to know, you can write 'I don't know', 'nothing', 'unclear', or 'not today'.

What I noticed in my body:

Where I noticed it:

Words that describe the sensation:

Intensity from 0–10:

Did my mind try to explain it?

What happened when I came back to the body?

“What do I notice in the room now?”

2. Body, Feeling, Thought

Aim

To separate body sensations, emotions, and thoughts.

Sometimes these get mixed together. For example:

"I feel like I'm a failure" or "I feel like I'm bad"

This sounds like a feeling, and it may carry a lot of emotion, but the sentence itself is more like a thought or belief.

A more separated version might be:

- Body: heavy chest, tight throat
- Feeling: shame, sadness
- Thought: "I'm a failure"

Separating these layers can help you understand yourself more clearly.

Exercise: The Three-Layer Check-In

Layer	Question	Example
Body	What sensations are here?	tight chest, heavy arms
Feeling	What emotion might be here?	sadness, fear, shame
Thought	What is my mind saying?	"I should be over this"

Note: on naming emotions...

You do not have to be certain. In such cases it might help to use soft language:

- "There may be some sadness here."
- "Something like anger might be present."
- "I wonder if this is fear."
- "Maybe this is shame, or something close to shame."
- "I do not know exactly, but this word feels close."

A helpful resource:

Search online for "Feelings Wheel" if you want a list of emotion words or visit <https://feelingswheel.com>

2. Body, Feeling, Thought (cont.)

In my body, I notice:

e.g. tightness, heaviness, warmth, numbness, restlessness

Emotionally, there may be:

(an emotion, several emotions, or no clear emotion yet)

My mind is saying:

For now, I do not need to solve this. I can notice it.

What changed, if anything, after separating these layers?

3. Staying With a Feeling Briefly

Aim

To practise being with a feeling in a small, steady, manageable way.

The goal is not to make the feeling disappear.

The goal is to learn:

I can feel something and still be here.

Step 1: Choose one body sensation

For example:

- tightness in the chest
- heaviness in the stomach
- warmth in the face
- tension in the shoulders
- numbness or blankness

Step 2: Choose an anchor

The anchor is not a distraction. It is what helps you stay connected to the present while noticing the feeling.

You might use:

- your feet on the floor
- your back against the chair
- your hands touching
- an object you can see
- a sound in the room

Step 3: Notice both

Say to yourself:

I notice this feeling in my body,
and I notice my feet on the floor.

Or:

The feeling is here,
and the room is also here.

3. Staying With a Feeling Briefly (cont.)

Step 4: Stay for up to 30 seconds

(five seconds is still practice.)

Gently notice the feeling.

Ask:

- Where are the edges of it?
- Does it stay the same or change?
- Is it tight, heavy, hot, cold, numb, shaky, or something else?
- Can I make a little more room for it?
- Can I notice the feeling and my anchor at the same time?

If the feeling becomes too intense, stop before 30 seconds and return to the room.

Step 5: Return to the room

After 30 seconds:

- look around
- name three objects
- feel your feet
- take a breath
- remind yourself where you are

3. Staying With a Feeling Briefly (cont.)

Reflection

The feeling or sensation I chose:

Where I felt it:

My anchor was:

Intensity before, from 0–10 (or low / medium / high):

Intensity after, from 0–10 (or low / medium / high):

What helped me stay with it?

What did I notice?

What helped me stop or come back?

4. Using Images Instead of Analysis

Aim

To explore feelings through image, colour, and metaphor rather than explanation.

Sometimes words are hard to find. Images can help.

Exercise: Emotion as Weather

Ask yourself:

If this feeling were weather, what kind of weather would it be?

For example it might be:

- fog
- heavy rain
- a storm building
- icy wind
- grey clouds
- a bright sunny day
- humid pressure
- weak sunlight
- still air

There is no right answer.

4. Using Images Instead of Analysis (cont.)

You can imagine noticing the weather from a window, rather than standing in the middle of it if this feels too immersive.

If this feeling were weather, it would be:

Where do I notice this weather in or around my body?

Is it moving or still?

Is it changing or staying the same?

What happens if I let it be there for a few moments?

What do I need afterwards?

Before moving on, look around the room and notice three ordinary objects.

4. Using Images Instead of Analysis (cont.)

You can draw the feeling instead. (It does not need to look good. Scribbles, shapes, colours, lines, or symbols all count.)



What colour is it?

What shape is it?

Where is it in the body?

Is it sharp, soft, cloudy, heavy, spiky, wavy, blank or blocked?

Is there any part of the body that feels neutral or calm?

5. What Might This Feeling Need?

Aim

To respond to emotion with care rather than trying to fix it immediately.

Emotions often carry needs.

For example:

Feeling	Possible need
sadness	comfort, tenderness, rest
anger	boundary, protection, honesty, movement
fear	safety, reassurance, grounding, orientation
shame	kindness, privacy, acceptance
loneliness	connection, witness, contact
numbness	patience, gentleness, less pressure
overwhelm	slowing down, simplification, containment

Exercise: Asking the Feeling

Choose a feeling or body sensation you have noticed.

Ask:

- If this feeling could want something, what might it want?
- Does it want comfort, protection, space, rest, movement, reassurance, or connection?
- Is there anything it does not want?
- What is one small kind thing I could offer myself?

Small responses might include:

- putting a hand on your chest
- wrapping yourself in a blanket
- writing one honest sentence
- stepping outside for fresh air
- sending a message to someone who usually feels safe enough
- moving your body gently
- resting for five minutes
- saying no to something
- making a cup of tea

5. What Might This Feeling Need? (cont.)

The feeling I noticed was:

The body clues were:

This feeling might need:

One small response I can offer is:

What happened after I responded? Did anything soften, shift, stay the same, or become clearer?

(no change is okay too, it doesn't mean you did it wrong)

Between-Session Practice

Try this once a day, a few times a week, or whenever you remember.

Keep it short. Two minutes is enough.

Right now I notice:

Body:

Feeling:

Mind:

Need:

You can practise when you feel neutral, not just when you are upset.

For example, you might notice:

- hunger
- tiredness
- calm
- warmth
- mild irritation
- restlessness
- boredom
- comfort
- sensory overload
- pressure
- ease
- tension

Learning to notice ordinary body signals can make it easier to notice emotional signals too.

Weekly Reflection

What body signals did I notice most often?

Which feelings were easiest to name?

Which feelings were hardest to name?

When did I notice myself moving into analysing?

What helped me come back to the body?

What do I want to practise next week?

What am I beginning to learn about my body's signals?

Is there anything I need to do less of next week?

A Wee Reminder

You do not need to force anything.

You do not need to name every feeling correctly.

You do not need to solve the feeling straight away.

The practice is simply:

- Notice what is here.
- Stay gently connected.
- Return to the present.
- Offer yourself care.

If this work brings up more than you can hold alone, it is okay to seek support.

About Me

My name is Phil and i'm a psychotherapist based in Aberdeen, Scotland.

For over 15yrs now I've been helping those navigating away from high-control religions in various contexts.

If you found this workbook helpful I'd love to hear how, do feel free to reach out.

If you are seeking to work with a therapist I can offer therapy nationwide in the UK and therapeutic coaching worldwide. I am passionate about making therapy accessible to those who are less privileged financially and as such I have a sliding scale pricing policy.



Contact Me



phildrysdale.com



therapy@phildrysdale.com



[@phildrysdale](https://www.instagram.com/phildrysdale)