

Definitions of a “felt sense”



A felt sense “is not a formed content but a process of self-responding” (Gendlin).

A felt sense is not a mental experience but a physical one...Physical. A bodily awareness of a situation or person or event. An internal aura that encompasses everything you feel and know about the given subject at a given time – encompasses it and communicates it to you all at once rather than detail by detail. Think of it as a taste, if you like, or a great musical chord that makes you feel a powerful impact, a big round unclear feeling... A felt sense doesn’t come to you in the form of thoughts or words or other separate units, but as a single (though often puzzling and very complex) bodily feeling. (Gendlin (b) 1979, p.32).

The felt sense is a direct bodily awareness and experience of our inner state. It is more than simply knowing there is sadness, anger or happiness inside. It is as if you can extract a feeling and all that surrounds it – where the feeling came from, what’s inside of it, the strands of its intricacies and subtleties and the historical roots. (Rappaport, 2009, p. 28)

“We can see the difference when people move from a feeling to the felt sense. The feeling is made from (and understandable from) the known, formed story detail. But in the felt sense the implicit situation is a much larger whole” (Gendlin The client’s client).

“A felt sense also lets one be a stronger self. Because the felt sense is a self enclosed whole. I who have it am freed in a certain way. To have this whole makes a person bigger than usual. In contrast, an emotion overtakes and sweeps the person along. When swept along by an emotion there is a temporary diminution of self” (Gendlin 1996 p. 80).

“One has a felt sense when one can feel more than one can understand. When what is there is more than words and thoughts. When something is quite definitely experienced but is not yet clear and when something hasn’t opened up or released yet” (Nada Lou 2009 p. 72 in Gray and Marder eds).

“When a person gropes for words and evidently has something that is not words yet” that is a felt sense. “Anything that comes this way should be welcomed it is the organism’s next step”. In focusing even if what comes is not liked it still feels good or there is a forward step or a softening in some way (Nada Lou, 2009, p. 72 Gray and Marder eds).

Kevin McAvenue describes the stage of “allowing a felt sense to emerge” as follows:

“It is first of all about inviting what wants your attention to become more fully present in the way that “it” needs to, so that it can fully reveal its story. This invitation is then the starting point for a relationship with this place in which you

can listen from (or with) your whole body sense of Ground and presence to how it wants to express itself” (2006, pg 21).

“Focusing invitations lead the focuser towards the bodily “felt sense” of a something, a something that is at first vague and fuzzy or murky. Through focusing this “something” gets clearer and gets symbolized. The symbol may be a word, phrase, image, sound or gesture (all are OK). The symbol is checked against the bodily felt experiencing. When the symbol is accurate there is a beginning “felt shift”. The felt sense is then asked in a friendly way open-ended questions so as to bring new insights and physiological release and a feeling of well being” (Friedman, 2007, p.43).

“Focusing is a process of finding felt senses, being friendly to them, symbolizing then and allowing them to shift. A self-propelled feeling process carries forward the focuser’s experiencing until a stopping place is reached” (Friedman, 2007, p.43-44).

Felt experience refers to an awareness of that which is directly experienced inside us without the mediating influence of thoughts, beliefs, judgments, or intellectual analysis. It includes feelings, emotions and sensations that arise from within us. Eg fear may feel tight in our body, or heaviness can reflect sadness or tingling can express excitement (Amodeo 1986, p 27).

The felt sense is a wonderful phenomenon It contains all of your inner knowing about a given situation and that which you do not yet know about yourself. Your felt sense can lead you to the next growth step. It can even sense and answer that has not yet been experienced. The felt sense is something before mind, body and spirit are split apart. (Hinterkoph 1998, p.19)

Properties of a felt sense (Rappaport, 2009, p 33)

- It is bodily – a felt sense resides in the body
- It is an integrated whole of mine, body and spirit
- It occurs at the border between the conscious and unconscious
- It is more than a feeling or emotion: it carries with it the whole of experience – what the feeling is connected to, its history connections and so forth
- Initially, a felt sense seems vague, unclear and almost blurry prior to it coming into “focus”
- It takes time to sense and/or to form
- It opens and offers more, in steps – what it is about its essence and what it needs
- It can offer a felt vision of what I would be like to be all healed
- It connects one to their innate wisdom
- It is a doorway to creativity