

Definitions of Focusing from writers and teachers of focusing

“Focusing is a process in which you make contact with yourself with a special kind of internal bodily awareness in which your body lets you know what the crux of the issue is and the next right step to resolve it” (Gendlin).

Focusing is the process of listening to your body in a gentle accepting way and hearing the messages that your inner self is sending you. It's a process of honoring the wisdom that you have inside you, becoming aware of the subtle level of knowing that speaks to you through your body” (Ann Weiser Cornell).

“A bodily sensed intelligence...focusing allows our minds to see what our bodies already know about the whole of a situation” (Kevin Flanagan).

Every situation you encounter in life, whether it is joyful or sad, large or small gives you a distinct body sense. In Focusing you learn how to attend to the subtle language of the sensing body that has its own sense of the next right step. Every concern you have, if you sit with it, at the unclear edge, has a sense of a next right step. You have a lot of wisdom in there and Focusing is a way to access that wisdom” (Joan Klagsbrun).

“Focusing teaches a way of being with feelings, respecting and even making friends with them in a non-critical way; holding a gentle nonjudgmental curiosity toward whatever you find inside. Focusing works when you can hold whatever you find inside in a caring loving presence. It works when you can trust your own inner process and stay with the sensation/feeling until words or images emerge from it and it begins to change on its own” (Linda Gray (2009, p. 9).

Focusing is a process of finding felt senses, being friendly to them, symbolizing them 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. 44).

“With Focusing you become your own guru”. Focusing gives you “The power to access our own feelings and make sense of them with both mind and body” Focusing is a powerful process that taps the power we all have to live life in a manner that is more congruent with who we really are; to find what it is we really need; to tap into how we really want to be. Once tapped the power to be becomes possible” (Hernandez 2009 p. 42 in Gray and Marder eds).


“Focusing is a quiet, direct, affective, eyes closed sensing into one's bodily experiencing to find one's whole ‘Felt sense’ of a problem, issue or situation and, through asking the felt sense questions, to achieve one or more “felt shifts,” bodily resolutions of the matter” (Friedman, 2007, p 43).

Focusing is simply the little, specific essence of directing the person's attention to what is not yet clear. And what is not yet clear can be directly sensed in the body. There is a special level, a special kind of space, a special kind of attention that most people don't know, to allow the body to form a wholistic sense of some problem. If one can stop and allow the body to respond to that, that problem or anything, there

will be a bodily sense that will not be clear at first, no matter how much one knows about the problem. It includes everything one knows, but it is always a single whole, a single sense. This bodily sense has his own directions. It has its own need to form a further step. And something comes there, which one can't get any other way (Gendlin & Lietaer 1983).

The core dynamic of contemplative practices is pausing the momentum or everyday activity and thought and holding our attention still long enough to let something emerge in its own time and its own way from the infinitely generative realm of our not yet formed knowing. David Rome 11/1/16 Online course Focusing and Mindfulness.

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

Not every body feeling is a felt sense. But a felt sense is a body feeling. The Felt sense is of the whole situation and is felt in the body.

The felt sense is already there when you call it “this” or ‘that’. If there really is an ‘it’ there just wait, be patient – something real is there already. You don’t have to work hard. You just need to bring interested curiosity and you don’t have to push.

And we know it is a felt sense because the words take some time to come and when they come there is relief. (Gene Gendlin and Ann Weiser Cornell, conversations with Ann and Gene November 2016)