

Gendlin's Steps for effective Focusing (adapted from Gendlin's Focusing 1978, p 49-57)

Gendlin developed an approach to Focusing based on these six steps. I include them here to clarify these steps.

1. PAUSE/CLEARING A SPACE
2. FELT SENSE
3. DESCRIBE IT (HANDLE)
4. DOES THAT FIT (RESONATE)
5. ASK (SOME QUESTIONS)
6. RECEIVE (THE ANSWERS)

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1. Clearing a space

When clearing a space we take a moment to pay attention inward, in to our body and see what is there when you ask: How is my life going? What is the main thing/s for me now? We sense these things within your body and then we let the answers come slowly. When some concerns come we do not go inside "it".

We stand back and say 'yes that's there, I can feel that there'. Then you find a little space or distance between you and that "something". For example, you may be worried about an exam coming up or an assignment that is due or the fight you had with your partner, sibling, parent or friend. We can put these "somethings" outside of ourselves. For example, we can put these "somethings" on the floor in front of us or across the room or on an island in the middle of the ocean. You can find the right distance between you and "it" as you start to put the things you want to deal with outside of yourself. Then you ask again what do you feel. Wait again and sense. Usually, there are several things. Do this until you think/feel all your issues are acknowledged and you have put them at the right distance from you.

Don't forget – if you prefer you can just go inside to focus, without clearing a space. After a gentle guide in just wait and see what comes and let yourself feel the unclear sense of all that comes.

This first step – pausing to clear a space – is such an important part of the process, it is worth explaining Gendlin's first step in more detail.

I use Clearing a space as a standalone practice that can be used whenever you feel overwhelmed by lots of issues. And sometimes I use it to decide what issue to work on if you have a few.

Gendlin says of Clearing a Space:

“It is the time when you establish an environment of friendly feeling within yourself. You prepare to give yourself a fair hearing”. (Gendlin Focusing P79)

It has two purposes:

- To take an inventory of issues and feelings which are present in your life,
- To give you some space to breathe and simply be.

From there you are more able to give your attention to the most important thing for you right now. Or maybe you can just dwell in the cleared space for a while.

What are we doing when we are clearing a space?

We are acknowledging our issues and feelings and placing them aside for a moment.

We are not ignoring problems or trying to make anything go away.

- Start by acknowledging whatever is present with you.
- Find a description for it then check the description... does it fit just right?
- [A description can be: a word, a phrase, an image, a colour, a body sensation, a metaphor, a sound... or something else.]
- Then imagine finding the right distance between you and it.

Some questions that help you to find the right distance.

Can you place it a little away from you?

For example: On the floor beside you. On a shelf. In a filing cabinet. On the seat next to you.

If you are with something with a lot of energy in it, you might need something a little stronger.

Can you take a step back from it?

Can you put it on an island in the middle of an ocean?

Maybe ask in your body what feels like the right distance?

Don't force it; sometimes it might need to sit on your lap. Other times it might need to be at the other side of the planet. It will tell you. (Adapted from Jane Quayle).

When you are working with someone it can be helpful to have some language and ways of talking that will help a person point to and be present with their 'felt sense' and also ask that 'felt sense' some questions.

2. Felt sense

From what came, select one personal problem to focus on. Do not go inside it and try to deal with it or fix it. Stand back from it and consider it from the distance you have created between you and it. This enables you to come into relationship with "it".

Now there is "it", the issue, and you (the "I"). Pay attention to where you usually feel things in your body and let yourself get a sense of what the whole of that problem or issue feels like. Let yourself feel the unclear sense of all that or, in other words, allow yourself to accept what you are feeling and seeing. It might not be immediately clear or straight forward but just wait and see what comes. There may be a physical sensation: for example, a tightness in your chest, or a word/s, example "tight" or an image: example, the image of a band around your chest. There is no wrong or right answer so just allow and acknowledge whatever comes.

3. Handle

Now you are sensing if there is a distinct quality of this unclear felt sense that you can describe. You are sensing into your body and letting your body talk. Just be with this felt sense, this bodily sensation and wait and see what comes.

In this step, you're trying to get a handle on the feeling. Some people can think of a word or phrase to describe what they are feeling. Others find it easier to reach for an image or metaphor. It might be a quality word like "tight", "stuck", "heavy", "fluttery" or words like "I am sensing a lump in my throat" or "butterflies in my stomach" or an "ache below my hip" or "something in my groin that I quite find words for". It may come like a phrase eg "like water falling", or "like a waterfall", or "something surging up" or "rolling down". Stay with the quality of the felt sense till something fits it just right.

4. Resonating

If you are in a partnership with a listener, they will repeat what you say (if you are on your own you can do this yourself). Go back and forth between the "felt sense" and the word or phrase or image and check how they resonate with one another. See if there is a little bodily signal (a shift – eg a big breath or sigh, a changed sensation internally, a "aha yes that's right").

To do this you have to have both the "felt sense" and the word and that can sometimes take a while to come or feel comfortable or appropriate. The key is

not to force an answer or rush to a response, but often just to be with it and let the felt sense change, until they feel just right in capturing the quality of the felt sense. Be accepting if there is still something unclear. Accept that too.

5. Asking

In this step, the Focuser asks “what is in this sense – the whole of it?” What makes it so tight or heavy or however you have described it? What does this thing that we've identified and put outside of you seem to need from you? How does it want you to be with it? Be with the felt sense until something comes along with a slight shift or give or release.

6. Receiving

Next, we receive whatever comes in a friendly gentle way. Stay with it for a little while. Something else may come but stay here and show your body empathy and gratitude for its wisdom.

Two more steps

Friedman, who was a student and client of Gendlin, adds two more things at either end of Gendlin's 6 steps to create an 8-step process. One is saying hello which is really a gentle lead in and which is covered in the handout materials I have prepared. This allows the person to get settled and go inside. The second additional step is coming back into the room. He felt it is important to bring the person back and ground them and ask them how they are and whether they want to say anything