

Family Feelings Check-In

Recommended Age Range: All ages

Treatment modality: Family therapy or as an adjunct to individual therapy.

Rationale for activity: This activity gives a concrete way for family members to share their perceptions of recent events. It can be used routinely, as a simple check-in at the start of each session. Or it can be used as a way to begin processing feelings after a significant event.

Goals of activity:

- 1) As a routine check-in, this activity gives the therapist a quick overview of any significant events that have happened since the last session.
- 2) It allows each family member to share their emotional reactions to recent events. Most people are pretty good at naming the basic emotions: *happy*, *sad*, *angry*, and *scared*. The Word Finder provides an expanded vocabulary, giving all family members the opportunity to express their emotions more precisely. This is helpful for both positive emotions and for more difficult emotions.
- 3) Information gleaned during the check-in can be incorporated into whatever therapeutic interventions are planned for that session.

Other benefits: With this activity, players

- Recognize the connection between situations and consequent emotions.
- Identify (and discriminate between) a wide variety of emotions.
- Develop insight and empathy by discussing situations with other family members.
- Learn that some situations may give rise to “mixed emotions” of varying intensity.
- Create an opportunity for discussion about the connection between events, thoughts, and emotions, providing a foundation for cognitive-behavioral therapy.

Materials needed:

Feelings Word Finder chart. The chart has words that can be used to describe feelings. The words are grouped into four categories: The **Yellow** section has words that describe pleasurable feelings about a situation; the **Blue** section has words associated with sadness or regret; the **Red** section has words that express dissatisfaction with a situation; the **Green** section has words associated with feelings of uncertainty.



Colored markers. You will need a different color of marker for each member of the family, in order to “color code” their responses. (Another option is to use colored paper clips, a different color for each family member.)

Instructions:

1. For use as a routine check-in: Ask each family member to think of three feelings that he or she has had in the last week (or since the last session). Have each person circle those three feelings using his or her colored marker (or mark them with his or her colored paper clip). Once everyone has finished, have family members take turns telling when and where they experienced each feeling. (Have the first person tell one feeling, then go on to the next person. Continue until each person has shared all three feelings.) The therapist can ask questions for clarification. During that day’s session, the therapist may want to draw on information shared through the check-in activity.

2. As a way to begin processing a significant event: During any therapy session in which the family needs to talk about a significant event, the Feelings Check-In can get the ball rolling. Proceed in the same way as described above. Another option is to give each person their own Word Finder and have them mark as many feelings related to the event as are relevant to them. This can yield information about the intensity of feelings: for example, one person might mark ten words in the angry section, and none in the other sections. This provides information for processing during the therapy session.