

PRESENCE

A Guide to Transforming
Your Most Challenging Emotions



by Ann Weiser Cornell
author of *The Power of Focusing*
& *Focusing in Clinical Practice*

“Presence: A Guide to Transforming Your Most Challenging Emotions is a scintillating selection of the “tips” that Ann Weiser Cornell, the foremost Focusing teacher in the English-speaking world today, has been sending weekly for years to her many online followers. Each tip responds to a real question from a particular individual, yet all of them touch on universal themes, ranging from depression and avoidance to relationship challenges, anger, and feelings of shame and self-criticism. The key to resolving all of these challenges lies in our ability to be truly, lovingly present to ourselves — “Self-in-Presence” Ann calls it—and this book shows us how to cultivate this invaluable inner skill. Presence is a user-friendly book, beautifully designed and illustrated, and written with Ann’s characteristic clarity, directness, and warmth. It is a true feast for the soul, full of wise and practical recipes for living a fuller and happier life.”

— DAVID I. ROME, author of *Your Body Knows the Answer: Using Your Felt Sense to Solve Problems, Effect Change, and Liberate Creativity*

“Emotional health lies not with arguing against, overcoming or “rising above” our emotions, but with understanding what they are trying to tell us, and using their enormous power constructively. In this lovely, warm, and elegantly written book, Ann Weiser Cornell shows people how they can “be with” even the most difficult and challenging emotional states and life situations and come out the other side richer, wiser, stronger, and more able to go forward in their lives. Reading this book is like having Ann’s warm, reassuring voice right next to you showing you the way to reach the nuggets of wisdom and transformation within. It should be every Focuser’s Focusing companion!”

— HELENE G. BRENNER, PH.D., Psychologist & Author of *I Know I’m in There Somewhere: A Woman’s Guide to Finding Her Inner Voice and Living a Life of Authenticity*

“Accessible yet deep, Presence is an important book about taking care of our emotions and understanding how they can be transformed. In her genuine and warm-hearted style, Ann Weiser Cornell answers practical questions from real people about their struggles with challenging emotions. Readers facing all kinds of difficulties – from compulsive eating and addictions to making difficult decisions – will be able to use Ann’s wisdom to learn how to embrace and transform their emotions without blocking or suppressing them.”

— ANNIE MAHON, author of the blog rawmindfulness.com and the book, *Things I Did When I Was Hangry: Navigating a Peaceful Relationship with Food*



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A GUIDE TO TRANSFORMING
YOUR MOST CHALLENGING
EMOTIONS

Ann Weiser Cornell



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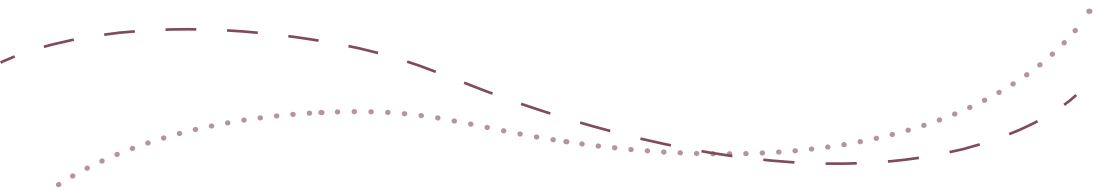
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APPRECIATIONS



Many people helped make this book a reality. At the top of the list is my dear friend and collaborator of more than 20 years, Barbara McGavin.

Barbara and I met in 1991, both Focusing teachers, and from that very first meeting there was a creative spark as we discovered that we had been thinking along the same lines about what people really need to get deep emotional transformation. We co-developed an approach to Focusing called Inner Relationship Focusing. A few years later, when we both faced some of the biggest challenges of our lives, our friendship and working partnership enabled us to not just get through those challenges, but to actually create a



BARBARA MCGAVIN

transformational method for finding emotional healing and fresh life possibilities in life's most difficult problems. The process we created, which we now call Untangling (also known as Treasure Maps to the Soul), can be found throughout this book. For example, the concept of Self-in-Presence is from the Untangling work.

I say that “we” created the Untangling process — and that is true but many of the ideas came first from Barbara. There is no way that this book would have existed without Barbara. Our ongoing collaboration has illuminated my life in countless ways.

Next I need to thank all the people whose questions to me made this book possible. Your courageous sharing of your struggles, with the specific detail that makes the questions so easy to relate to, were absolutely essential, and I'm humbly grateful. I had conversations with other Focusing teachers, dear friends and colleagues, who helped me clarify what I wrote in these Tips. Most notably: Lucinda Hayden, a gifted collaborator and fabulous teacher whose ability to hold a big vision supports this work on every level; Helene Brenner, a remarkable healer and teacher with a leading-edge ability to understand the depths of process; Stefan Ebert, whose sensitivity and intelligence go to the heart of what matters.

I stand in deep awe and gratitude to my amazing team here at Focusing Resources

— Shannon Crossman, Brittany Dean, Maggie Hurley — I list them in alphabetical order because there is no way to classify their priceless contributions. Maggie gets a special mention for designing the book so beautifully and finding most of the illustrations. Shannon flowed the text into the book which was a monumental task, and held the whole project with her unmatched gifts for moving things forward. Brittany is the one who sifted through over 400 tips to select the 43 we used in this book and also contributed her fine-tuned sense for just the right note in both design and editing.

And we're all grateful to L. Herrada-Rios whose support in the office made the work on this book possible, including answering the phone so the rest of us could keep on task.

My daughter Mika also contributed with great conversations and emotional support, and, as always, first and last, my beloved life partner Joe McBride.

Ann Weiser Cornell



INTRODUCTION



This book was created for people who need help and support to find a better relationship with their own challenging emotions. When emotions knock us over, we can't think clearly or act wisely, and we suffer.

But the solution is not to suppress our emotions, because then we lose what makes us human and we lose some of the vital information to help us make wise choices. Also, emotions that are suppressed remain unchanged...but so do emotions that are allowed to run wild and take us over.

People struggle with shame, anxiety, rage, frustration... To feel, to try not to feel, to feel less, to hide what we feel from others...and if the struggle has gone on for years, people also struggle with hopelessness that it could ever be another way.

Well, it can. With Inner Relationship Focusing (also called Focusing) there is definitely another way.

This book is a selection of the questions asked me by real people struggling with emotion-related issues over the last five years, and my answers. We've grouped them into sections: Intense Feelings, Decisions and Frustration, The Trouble with Feeling Happy, Emotion Wars, Avoiding Feelings, Anxiety and Anger, Unfulfilled Desire and Relationships, Shame and Self-Criticism, Overwhelm and Tears —Identifying with Parts, Trauma, and, finally, Good Feelings.

These questions and answers originally appeared in a Weekly Tips email newsletter. In that newsletter, I could assume that my readers shared some background information and awareness of concepts like 'Focusing,' 'Self-in-Presence,' 'parts' and the like. I want to take a bit of time to explain those concepts here so that you, the reader, can get the most out of this book.

Focusing is simple: You invite the bodily feel of any situation that troubles you and offer it non-judging awareness, and it then opens up into insight and positive life

change. But Focusing may not seem simple because it is truly revolutionary—it turns our usual cultural assumptions on their heads.

For example, we usually think:

- We have to fix ourselves or get someone to fix us — but actually, positive change is inherent in us if we learn how to give ourselves a certain kind of attention and get out of our own way.
- We have to get over or get past our emotional states — especially the ‘ugly’ ones like fear or shame — but actually, even the very ‘worst’ feelings contain gifts of positive energy, if we turn toward them with compassion and curiosity.
- Our bodies are purely physical and that intelligence is in the brain and the mind — but actually, the body process as felt from the inside is much vaster and wiser than the intellect alone.

Focusing was developed by Eugene Gendlin out of research into successful psychotherapy yet its uses have gone far beyond therapy, really into every area of life. Basically Focusing is something you can do — in any moment of your life — to shift your relationship to whatever is going on, and also something you can do in quiet, meditation-like sessions to explore and bring change to your challenging life issues. If you’d like to know more about how to do Focusing, we have suggestions in the Resources section at the end of this book.

Knowing how to do Focusing is not required for you to make use of this book, but it may help to know that in Focusing you invite the body feel of what you are going through, something we call a ‘felt sense.’ You then bring acceptance and curiosity to this felt sense, and you experience steps of insight and relief.

Inner Relationship Focusing is a version of Focusing developed by Barbara McGavin and myself in order to make Focusing even more effective for emotion-based life issues. Inner Relationship Focusing includes the whole Focusing process as Gendlin set it out, and adds methods and concepts for working with parts and enhancing wholeness.

Parts are temporary aspects of the self that emerge when our full self is not available to handle emotional states or solve life problems. By their very nature, parts are at odds with each other, and so we experience painful inner conflict. We may find ourselves saying, for example, “Part of me wants to give up on this relationship because it’s too painful, but another part of me is hanging on and won’t let go.”

Protector parts (sometimes called ‘controlling’ parts) are parts that are worried about you and often express that worry through criticism and blame. **Defender parts** are parts that are rebellious or crushed, and may be impulsive and self-indulgent. **The Small One** is a type of part that holds a frozenness around an old trauma and is either hidden away or painfully retriggered by current events.

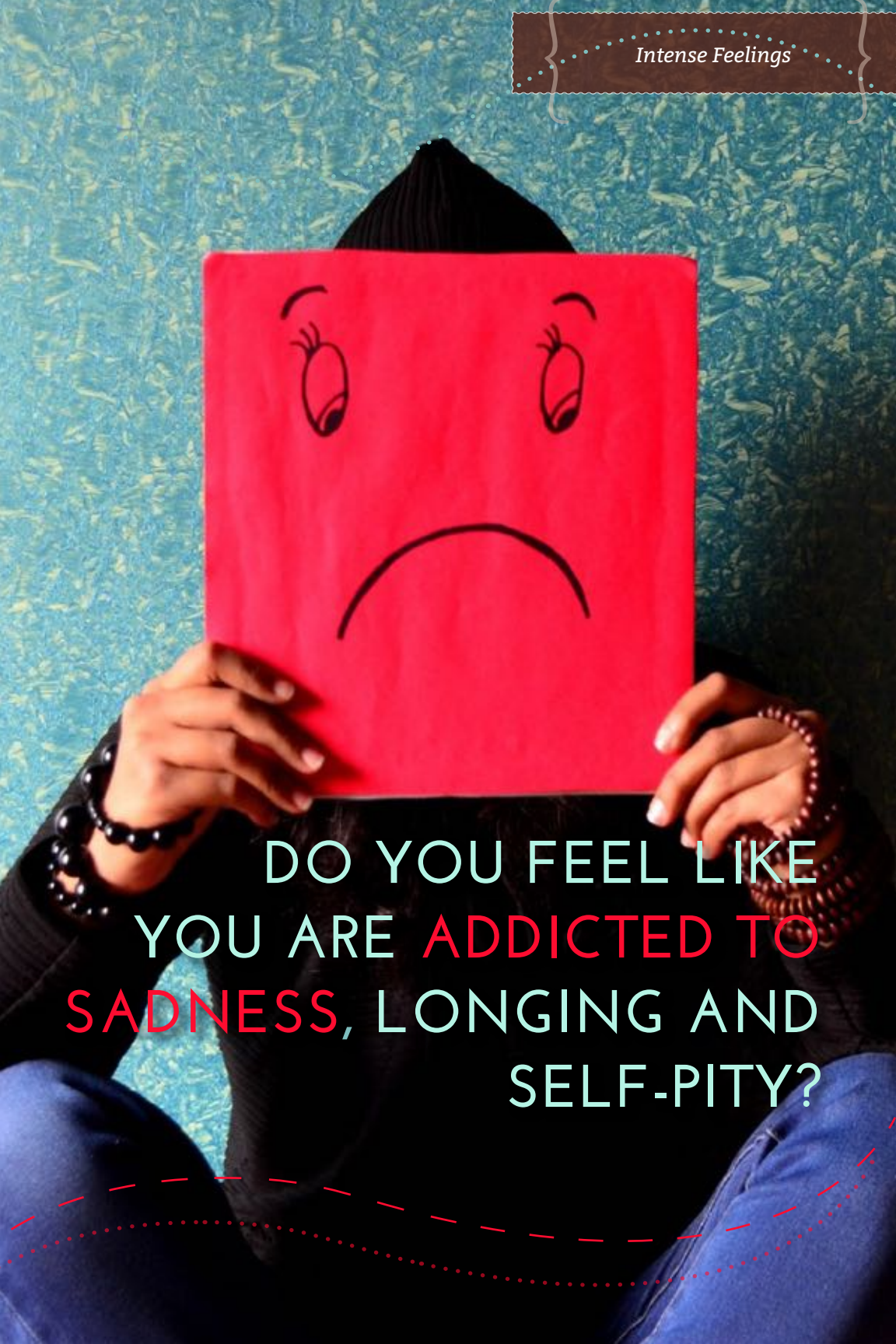
Self-in-Presence (also called Presence) is the most important concept in this book. In the first few Tips in the book I describe how to cultivate Self-in-Presence. Almost every other Tip adds to an understanding of how to bring Self-in-Presence to a current issue.

Self-in-Presence is the ability to turn toward our challenging emotions rather than being caught up in them. You will hear me talk about “giving company” to your feelings or “being with” your emotional states. It may help to [re-read page 12](#) when you forget what this means or you aren’t sure how to do it. For example, one way to give company to your emotional state is to let a gentle hand move to the place in your body where you feel it. You can say, “I am with you,” or “I am here.” This isn’t always easy...and many of the questions in the pages that follow are from people who found Self-in-Presence challenging. I hope I helped them!

And most of all I hope this book helps you, dear reader. Do let me know. I’m still answering questions—with pleasure!

Ann Weiser Cornell
Berkeley, California, USA

Intense Feelings

A person is shown from the chest up, holding a bright red rectangular card in front of their face. The card has a simple black line drawing of a sad face with two large, teardrop-shaped eyes and a curved, downward-opening mouth. The person is wearing a black long-sleeved shirt and blue jeans. They are also wearing black beaded bracelets on their left wrist and a brown beaded bracelet on their right wrist. The background is a textured blue and green surface. The text "DO YOU FEEL LIKE YOU ARE ADDICTED TO SADNESS, LONGING AND SELF-PITY?" is overlaid on the lower half of the image in a white and red font.

DO YOU FEEL LIKE
YOU ARE **ADDICTED TO**
SADNESS, LONGING AND
SELF-PITY?

“I am addicted to sadness, longing, self-pity, wishing, dreaming, etc...”

A READER WRITES:

Recently I identified myself as being addicted to the emotion of sadness, and all of the concomitant feelings/behaviors like longing, self-pity, wishing, dreaming, etc. Coming from an alcoholic home, I retreated often, drew inward to a sad place that was at least safe. My life choices all seem to have taken me to one sad situation after another. And other very unhappy life circumstances like the death of my young child many years ago have kept me stuck in this sad place.

Now I find myself working toward divorce from my second husband, a very functional alcoholic who is not a bad person. I’m asking myself, is it the sadness I’m feeling over losing this current relationship, or is it the habitual sadness from childhood? How do I separate the ‘sad parts’ as ‘sad from life situation’ part with ‘sad from old childhood habit’ part?

DEAR READER:

I appreciate the self-compassion I hear in your email. You understand why that younger you, growing up in an alcoholic home, would have needed to retreat and would have found sadness a safe place to retreat to. At the same time, I would say it in a slightly different way, because the concept of being ‘addicted to’ sadness, etc. might be keeping the process static, not allowing the movement that is possible.

‘Something in you’ is holding onto sadness, preferring to retreat into sadness, finding safety in feelings of longing and self-pity. Can you feel the difference

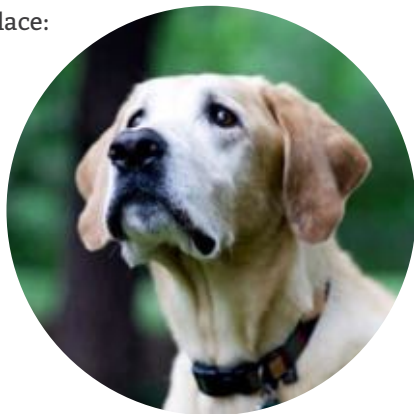
when we say it that way? “I am addicted to...” doesn’t turn toward the place itself, with an inner relationship of interested curiosity. “Something in me...” invites YOU to turn toward that one, to start listening.

Please don’t assume that you know all about why ‘something in you’ would want to hold onto sadness. “I already know” is another stance that makes change more difficult. You know a lot! But there is more...and by freshly being with the ‘something in you’ that is holding onto sadness (or whatever words it wants to use for itself) and simply being curious...and then acknowledging what it lets you know...this whole situation can begin to shift.

How to Separate Old Sadness from Fresh Sadness

In the situation you describe, it sounds like the current experience of sadness at losing your relationship is very intermingled with the old sadness. They are not very separate from each other in your experience right now...and that always has to be the starting place: how it is now.

My sense of it is that after you acknowledge both, the older sadness will need the first turn. As you give company to ‘something in you holding onto sadness’ from earlier times, there will come a sense of a burden lightening, and more space. From there, the current sadness won’t be as hard to be with.



I also suspect that there may be some unfinished business with the sadness of losing your young child. Our culture rarely allows people to spend enough time with grieving. You don’t have to deliberately go there. Just don’t be surprised if that is what comes...and let it be welcome.