

Thoughts, Feelings, & Actions

Relationship conflict usually comes from a situation getting out of control. Usually, people blame others or circumstances for this. The good news is that we can gain a good amount of control over how we respond in these situations. But before we can exercise this, we must first understand exactly what we do and do not have control over. We need to understand the connection between our thoughts, feelings and actions first.

1. Feelings are emotions – they are named by one word, such as mad, sad, glad, bad, or afraid.
2. Thoughts are ideas, beliefs, or perceptions, and are usually described with sentences, “I think this is a really great essay that Jussi is writing.”
3. Actions are behaviors that are observable such as crying, yelling, running, sitting, talking, etc.
4. If we can make a choice about something, we can exercise some control over it.
5. In case you didn’t know it, we cannot make choices for others.

Thoughts affect feelings. If I ask you to feel afraid, can you do it? Probably...but only if you think of something that scares you. Without the thought, you probably couldn’t feel afraid.

Actions affect feelings too – maybe you could make yourself feel afraid by doing something scary to yourself – what would that be for you? For many, climbing out on a ledge of a tall building and looking down would do it. Whether you choose to think about it or actually do it, the results are the same – your feelings will change.

We cannot choose our feelings, but we can choose our thoughts and actions. The problem for us all is that feelings affect actions and thoughts in powerful ways. When we feel strongly about something, we tend to think about it and act on it. Salesmen and advertisers know this, so they “sell” to our feelings – they tempt us. Conflict, like temptation, involves powerful feelings. If we cannot resist our feelings, we give in to them – we become slaves to our feelings and our actions seem automatic. We think we have no control. This thought, however powerfully it is experienced, is not true. With practice, you can gain control over your thoughts and actions, and then your feelings will start to change too.

Our thoughts and actions can lead to a situation getting out of control. If we raise our voice, choose hurtful words, and make physical gestures in reaction to a powerful feeling, we have just increased conflict. If we want to reduce this, we have to stop reacting to our feelings in habitual ways. Certain situations trigger these habitual reactions. The good news is that these triggers were learned – this means they can be unlearned. To successfully unlearn a trigger, you must be able to be in a situation and not think or act automatically, but instead, be able to choose how you will think or act. When you can make a different choice, you will regain a level of control. Reverse role-plays with Jussi are the most helpful way for you to gain control over your thoughts and actions. Writing exercises are the second most effective way.

I look forward to further facilitating you to regain self control, and thereby reduce conflict.