

Emotional Balance

Working with core emotions in support and coaching processes

Background information

When the support process focuses on feelings, it is often not in fact the actual emotions which are the subject of discussion but rather a mixture of perceived cognitions and patterns of behaviour. For example, the response to the question: "How do you feel in this situation?" could be: "I feel that I'm being used by my partner! And then I notice that I feel insecure."

Is 'being used' a feeling? No, it is behaviour on the part of another person. Is insecurity a feeling? No, it's a cognition, a perception. So what does the person involved actually feel? What emotions are actually involved in problem situations? How can we place everything in the right context? Can feelings be replaced, controlled or balanced in the first place?

Core emotions

A number of psychological approaches define up to eight basic or core emotions.

For operations in communications psychology the most useful and up-to-date concept is the *strategic short-term psychotherapy* approach developed by Giorgio Nardone. In support and coaching processes this concept differentiates between four different basic emotions, which in each case require a different form of intervention. As mentioned above they include the four pure states of emotional experience of happiness, sadness, anger and fear.

Further secondary feelings and states can be allocated to these core emotions. The table below provides some examples:

Basic emotion	Happiness	Sadness	Anger	Fear
<i>Related secondary emotions</i>	fun enjoyment joy excitement longing curiosity	sorrow distress resignation melancholy depression disenchantment disappointment gloom	irritation fury aggression indignation provocation activity endurance stamina	anxiety worry withdrawal panic mistrust shame timidity stage fright

A practical example:

During partnership counselling the wife emphasises her disappointment with her husband, who never takes care of the children. She is always the one who is responsible! As she says this she instinctively clenches her fists and her voice is hostile and loud. For his part the husband sits there passively. Exploratory question: "Does your situation make you feel most of all *angry* or does it make you feel *sad*?" She replies vehemently: "Both, naturally – I'm both *furious* and *disappointed*". He remains silent. The second exploratory question: "And if you occasionally have a moment on your own at home, without your husband or children, do you tend to feel overcome by *sadness* about your marriage or is your head full of *angry thoughts*? She replies defensively: "I try to avoid such situations. If I spent more time thinking about this, God knows where it would lead". Follow-up question: "Do you mean that this would take you deeply into a state of sadness?" Her eyes fill with tears. A question addressed to the husband: "Are you aware of the *sadness* this situation makes your wife feel?" He responds in surprise: "Actually I only know her as the one who takes charge of everything. If I do something it's always wrong anyway."

Analysis: for the wife anger represents a kind of defence, because if she gives herself up to sadness she fears that she will lose control. However, sadness needs to be given an opportunity, in order to prevent bitterness in the long term. It is a probable phenomenon that the husband simply isn't aware of her sadness. It would strengthen the relationship if he could practice feeling empathy for her sadness instead of having to protect himself against her anger. Both of them are lacking in the basic feeling of happiness, which would probably be able to develop once more if she was able to express her sadness and he could overcome his fear of her. Accordingly the interventions focused on fear and sadness. Her surface anger is only a substitute for what she really feels.

A second example from life counselling: the client receiving counselling expresses a total lack of hope and the inability to give his life any meaning. The first exploratory question is: "Do you feel this hopelessness because you regard yourself as being trapped inside your *sadness* and disappointment with life, or because you can no longer discover any cheerfulness, enjoyment or *happiness*? The client replies: "The way I live, where can I discover anything which brings *happiness*?" The next exploratory question: "Do you know longer find any pleasure in life because of a *fear* of disappointment, or because you know longer experience any vital energy (*anger*)?" And the client answers: "Yes, I am generally disappointed, because whatever I do always ends in failure." The next exploratory question is: "So you protect yourself against new disappointments. Is this protection necessary because you feel *fear* of renewed failure, or because it is so *painful* when the disappointment arrives?" Client: "For years now I've had the feeling that I've been holding myself back - yes, I think because of the *fear* of further disappointment."

Analysis: there seems to be a fear of sadness which acts as an obstacle to pleasure. Anger does not play a role here. However, what is ever present with the client is his sadness. He is sick and tired of it, but it is always there. In terms of cause it is therefore not a matter of avoiding sadness, but of avoiding fear. New experiences and assessments will only become possible after the client learns how to deal with this fear. For this purpose a ca-

capacity for anger is required as a source of energy. The intervention has to focus on the fear and promote the perception of anger or the capacity for anger.

Basic know-how about core emotions

A kind of 'glossary of feelings' can be developed on the basis of the four basic emotions – this is summarised in the following list:

Curiosity

- is based on the core emotion of happiness
- as a resource it is a first-class condition for learning
- as a negative factor it can lead to various forms of dependency
- if it is lacking people feel an absence of joy
- if curiosity is greatly exaggerated it creates a manic impression
- correction can take the form of control, reinterpretation or aversion

Disillusionment

- is based on the core emotion of sadness
- as a resource it is a useful condition for achieving a certain distance and keeping one's feet on the ground
- as a negative factor it can lead to various forms of depression
- if it is lacking, the individual can suffer from a lack of connectedness and relationships
- and if there is too much of it can lead to frustration
- correction can take the form of empathy and acceptance of vulnerability, or via the fantasy of everything becoming worse.

Endurance

- is based on the core emotion of anger.
- as a resource there is capacity for action and energy
- as a negative factor there is often a tendency towards violence
- if it is lacking people feel they are without strength or drive
- and if there is too much of it this could lead to restlessness or obsession
- correction takes the form of channelling and embedding.

Self-confidence

- has fear as the complementary basic feeling
- as a resource it provides fair and cooperative assertiveness
- as a negative factor it can lead to feelings of panic or anxiety
- if there is a lack of balance this often leads to feelings of shame or timidity
- and if it is exaggerated there is often a lack of sensitivity
- correction can take the form of dissociation, destruction or exaggeration.