

## Gefühlsmonsters® – First Steps for Couples

Welcome!

- Do you sometimes feel misunderstood by your partner?
- Are there situations that keep you in disagreement again and again?
- Are you looking for tools that help you express your emotions with each other in a way that promotes helpful conversation?

Then you have come to the right place!



Maybe you don't know how you can motivate your partner to try this new tool with you?

It's best you try out for yourself how the cards can be helpful. Let's see what insights they might give you after a few exercises?

It is our experience that involving a partner will be easier after you have tried it for yourself first.

And if you wished that your partner would enter this training with you right now, we can only suggest:

Stay with the decision that right now you want to do something for yourself about it. We promise that you'll both benefit.

## Step 1 **ON YOUR OWN**: FAMILIARIZING YOURSELF WITH THE GEFÜHLSMONSTERS®



Spread out the cards and look at them. You can do this either with a set of cards or using the free Gefühlsmonster® scan on our website.

- Are there any Gefühlsmonsters® that you spontaneously like?

- Do these representations remind you of situations that you have experienced?
- Or of other people, whom you have encountered with this attitude?

This is exactly what the cards do. Feelings—also representations of feelings—are contagious. That is why the cards that attract your attention have something to do with your own experience and can help you better understand yourself.

## Step 2 **ON YOUR OWN**: GETTING TO KNOW ALL THE CARDS



To get to know the individual cards, you can simply play with them. Either with a set of cards or using the free Gefühlsmonster® scan.

For example, you can sort the cards by color, according to the intensity of the feelings shown, or according to those that you personally like more or like less—you will notice that interesting thoughts might emerge already during this game.

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You are now ready for...

### Step 3 **ON YOUR OWN: WORKING WITH YOURSELF**



(There are more instructions on this in our Gefühlsmonster® Scan on our homepage.)

You will see that for each of the cards selected in this way you will recall a situation that has to do with you or that you have experienced. Take your time and make some notes if you want.

Have a look at the cards or at the Gefühlsmonster® scan in a relaxed way and ask yourself:

*“How am I feeling right now?”*

Let your eyes wander in an unfocused way over the cards. You may get deeper insights if you do not look for a feeling that you already have in mind, but rather look without a specific objective and be surprised by the cards that “emerge”.

## Step 4 **FOR BOTH PARTNERS:** INTRODUCTION

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**Let's begin with a few thoughts about feelings:**

How easily we can show our emotions or talk about them has more to do with our own past experiences than with our willingness to share them with our partner.

Everyone of our memories is stored with the emotion that we felt during the experience at the time. Our intellect assesses all experiences that follow based on whether we had pleasant or unpleasant emotions during a similar experience from the past. When an unpleasant emotion surfaces this way, our brain produces more thoughts that match this adverse emotion, and so on. Correspondingly this is true for pleasant feelings as well.

This means that we have an inner evaluation system that judges an occurrence according to our past experiences. Sometimes this doesn't fit the present situation anymore, because the person we are with or the situation itself is different from the past experience.

It takes personal work on oneself and/or confiding conversation with your partner or friends to distinguish which emotions have to do with the present situation and which relate to old feelings. One tip that may help recognizing that it's an old feeling is the fact that we can't look our partner in the eyes.

Basically our feelings are more connected to our past personal experiences and thoughts than to the person in front of us. Nevertheless it feels as if it was our partner who caused our reaction. That's why an honest exchange at this point is so important—and simultaneously

a huge challenge as well. Take your time!

And be gentle with the topic. We allow our partners more insight into who we are than we do other people in our lives and that makes us more vulnerable.

It is helpful to get to know and learn about our own feelings—by ourselves or with some support. This will give confidence, bring awareness to our own emotions and reactions, and prepare us to better deal with a shaken foundation in reaction to feedback from our partner.

### **Working on emotions together as a couple:**

When talking about each others emotions as partners we have some important recommendations.

#### **Recommendation 1:**

**It's not about truth, to be right or wrong, it's about our personal experience.**

This means:

When one shares their feelings it is information for the other. To discuss them is not helpful, however, finding a quiet moment to share and compare with each other how you feel about a certain event and how your partner feels about it is a better solution. More about this in step number 5.

Insights resulting from new brain research tell us

## Recommendation 2:

### No conversation about feelings while upset.

While we are upset our brain is only partly able to function. This would make it extremely difficult if not impossible to have a constructive discussion.

Oogway's quote in Kung Fu Panda seems appropriate:

"Your mind is like this water, my friend. When it is agitated, it becomes difficult to see. But if you allow it to settle, the answer becomes clear."

Often during discussions among couples one wants to continue the conversation in spite of a charged situation when the other does not. In this case we suggest the following course of action (that has proven successful in mediation):

Both partners agree in a quiet moment that the one that would like to end the conversation will announce this in a compassionate way (i.e. *"I need a break right now."* Take a moment here to find the right wording that feels good to both of you!). This partner then takes responsibility to continue the discussion at a later point, preferably within the next 24 hours. Don't procrastinate.

Sometimes just this separation alone is helpful and both realize that it is valuable not to continue the conversation. Then the partner who ended the discussion is responsible to find out if you agree on this.

## Step 5 **FOR BOTH PARTNERS: HOW AM I, HOW ARE YOU?**

Here we explore with playful comparison each other's emotions, for the simple reason to sur-

To practice tolerance of the diversities within each other is a helpful tool.

The following quote by John M. Gottman, award-winning speaker, author, and professor emeritus in psychology, who is known for his work in marital stability, seems appropriate:

*"69% of conflicts fall into the 'perpetual problem' category... Learn how to compromise. Become more tolerant of each other's imperfections."*

Try what works for you both!

We also suggest

## Recommendation 3:

### Don't remind each other of the recommendations while upset!

In our experience even well meant reminders may lead to an escalation of conflict.

Last but not least

## Recommendation 4:

### No tool is so efficient that it would transform a relationship into an always happy one.

So we encourage you to see the Gefühlsmonster® Cards as a tool. If you both agree to try it and allow some time for experimentation and practice, it can support your relationship positively.

Let's continue with a playful entry exercise into sharing your emotions for two:

prise each other with our thoughts and feelings within a given situation.



Please remember to keep it playful! Later on you can advance to looking at more challenging situations together.

sharing about emotions in every day life will become easier and more playful.

Now let's get ready for the chosen situation:

**Example: The visit from a friend**



To begin with, the partner who worked with the Gefühlsmonster® cards already might share their understanding of how they work.

Then choose an upcoming event in your life.

**Scenario 1:** You work with our [Dialogue Set](#) and have each a set of cards:

- 1) Each of you picks one to three cards that depict how you feel about the friend coming. Put them face down in front of you.
- 2) Next each returns to their set and picks one to three cards depicting the feelings they think their partner might have about the visit. Put them face down, separate from your first cards.

For example

- A visit from a friend
- Apartment hunting
- Travels with friends
- Buying a new appliance
- An outing
- Movie night
- Etc.....

The following picture might emerge:




Choose a topic that isn't charged with negative energy for one or both of you.

Please be prepared that your partner might analyze the depictions on the cards differently from you. Just listen with an open heart. Both of you receive the time needed to express their view sufficiently. And take time afterward to share your thoughts about this experience.



The good news is that when you practice this often with each other,

3) Person 1 starts by turning their cards over and explains the meaning they have for themselves.

4) Then the same partner turns the cards with their guess for the other partner's emotions and comments on it.

**Person 2 listens quietly.**

5) Now person 2 takes their turn showing and explaining their cards.

6) Finally person 2 also reveals the cards they chose for the other and comments on them.

**This time person 1 listens quietly.**

This might look like this:





Even when you share your analysis it's helpful to take turns. This way you can be sure that both of you can take the time needed to share their emotions. And you will achieve a dialog discipline that will prove beneficial for other, more challenging topics as well.

7) Now person 1 shares their thoughts on the overall picture. Person 2 listens and might take notes until their turn comes up.

For example, person 1 might say:

- *We have both picked the same card once. I feel \_\_\_ about that.*
- *I notice that we picked very different cards. I feel \_\_\_ about that.*
- *I am surprised that you picked card number \_\_\_.*
- ...

8) Now person 2 takes their turn while person 1 listens.

Finally you may talk with each other about what this exercise meant to you and what you learned from it.

**Scenario 2:** You work with just one set of cards.

Place the cards in an open spread in front of you, easily visible to both of you.

Each of you needs pencil and paper. To keep all the cards in the spread you will now write down the number found in the bottom right corner of the chosen card, instead of picking it up.

Now follow steps 1 to 8 of case number 1 together, but this time by picking up the chosen cards after both have noted the number on paper.

Place cards that both of you have chosen in the middle between you.

**Scenario 3:** You work with the Gefühlsmonster® Online-Scan on your computer.

Again each of you notes the card numbers on your paper.

Next you may sort them by dragging them on the blue surface. Do this in a way that keeps them separate for each of you. You may com-

bine the cards you don't need in one pile.

Now continue with steps 1 to 8.

## Step 6 **FOR BOTH PARTNERS: YOUR VIEW—MY VIEW**

After experiencing step 5, you are now prepared to work on minor irritations that we encounter in every day living. For example: disgruntlement after a celebration, or a resentment after a shopping trip, or ill feelings after working on a home improvement project.



We suggest to pick a situation relatively soon after you have worked on step 5, in which you have been bothered by something without it being of gigantic proportions.

Step 6 is really just a continuation of step 5 and works this way:

1. You both agree on a situation as mentioned above. Pick one to three cards that express your feelings at the time and one to three cards for how you think your partner might have been feeling.
2. Put the chosen cards in front of you, face down.
3. Agree who gets to go first and continue as described in step 5.
4. Take turns and comment on each card.

Continue as above.



It is important to listen to

each other and let each other finish their thoughts. Keep your own judgment at bay at this point.

Take your time and keep a sense of curiosity and stay open minded, remembering that your partner might have experienced the event very differently from yourself.

This way a tense situation can be defused and might spare conflict in similar situations in the future. We wish you to be successful with this!

Oh, and if need be use mediation help from an objective, outside person...

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And finally, if you like to play games we have two ideas that many people enjoy ...

## Step 7: GAME "MAKE BELIEVE STORIES"

The Gefühlsmonster® Cards are spread out in front of you face down. Each of you will pick one card and take turns in giving this Gefühlsmonster® a name and making up a story about what it might have experienced.

### Example (Variation A):



This is Tom who has finished cooking just in time before his friends come for dinner.

This is Max who would have liked to sleep in today.



And this is Kathy who is happy that she has just completed preparations for a presentation.

With a little practice you can also try making up a coherent story.



Rule: You have to use the card you chose, no matter if it fits or not. It will encourage your creativity...

And choose made up names, because names taken from your family or surroundings can lead to a game that might take an unpleasant turn.

### Example (Variation B):



This is Paul who has just found out that most of his friends decided on a hiking vacation in the mountains.

Marie is delighted. At last she quit lazily occupying the couch.



Peter is dreaming of the clean air, sunny meadows and a cool beer at the mountain inn.

Michael exclaims: *"This is definitely not for me!"*



Tom feels like crying, because he would have liked to see Sophie again, whom he had met on his last vacation in Greece.

And on and on...

## Step 8: **GAME "EMOTIONS REVERSED"**

And finally, another game in which you act out the attitude of a Gefühlsmonster®. It is even more fun when played with children or several people. Pick an experience that everyone can relate to.

**How to play:** The Gefühlsmonster® Cards are spread on the table face down.

1. Pick a situation like

- Going to a soccer game
- Welcoming a new neighbor
- Going to the movies
- Going to a home improvement store
- Going on a first date
- Inviting someone to your birthday party
- Having a job interview
- Etc. ... bring your own ideas!

2. Person A picks a card and keeps it hidden from the others. Then, using the agreed upon topic, acts out the mood of the Gefühlsmonster® on their card appropriately.

The other players have to guess which one of the monsters it might be. It is helpful if there is an open faced set spread out or a Gefühlsmonster® poster to refer to if the players are not familiar with all of the cards.



The aim here for the player is not acting out the monster's body posture, but it's mood relating to the topic.

Then move on to player 2, who will pick a card and act it out with the other players guessing, and so on...

You will notice that giggles will start in anticipation when a person draws an unfitting card even before it's being played out....

## Finally

We hope for you to have good conversations and insights with the Gefühlsmonsters®!

If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact us, we will be happy to

help. We also offer individual coaching and workshops to help dealing with emotions.

The Gefühlsmonster®-Team