

Conversation #3 Family Messages about Feelings

What was the emotional temperature like in your family growing up?

Sunny and Warm there was warmth, compassion, & safety to feel and show fears, sadness, and joy. Feelings weren't suppressed or shamed.

Stormy it was not safe to show vulnerable feelings, criticism, shame, punishment were used, it was unsafe, you never know when someone would blow up.

Icy and Cold needs were provided, everyone had physical needs but the message was don't show feelings, restrain yourself, adults were avoidant or dismissive of softer feelings and no room to explore feelings

Mixed or Chaotic sometimes it was warm and safe to show feelings and other times it was dangerous or not safe.

Think about and share with you partner some of the messages you got.

Emotions were a sign of weakness so no one could be afraid or sad

Anger was OK but not sadness,

Sadness was OK but not anger

Sadness was OK but not Joy

It was OK to be angry but not afraid

Your feelings had to be the same as your parent(s)

Expressing feelings was a sign of strength

Affection: Did people in your family hug or touch much? Did you see your parents touch each other?

Were some people allowed to be angry but not others? Was the anger safe or unsafe? Were your feelings validated or did grown-ups try to fix or talk you out of them? Was it ok to make mistakes or were you shamed?

When someone got hurt was there any repair? Was there any apology after a fight?

Who did you go to when you were upset or hurt? Was anyone there for you?

Exercise, take turns with your partner saying:

When I _____, I learned to do this from growing up and underneath, I feel _____ so I want to work on showing you _____ instead of _____

Adapted from Living Like You Mean It by Ron Frederick