



FEELINGS IN ACTION

Emotion in Movement

RESOURCE FOR
PHYSICAL ACTIVITY INSTRUCTORS



Every Movement Has a Feeling

HAVE YOU EVER NOTICED HOW DIFFERENTLY YOU MOVE WHEN YOU FEEL EXCITED, TIRED, NERVOUS, CALM, FRUSTRATED, OR JOYFUL?

When we are feeling confident, we may stand taller, move more freely, and take up more space. When we are feeling worried or uncertain, our movements may become smaller, slower, or more cautious.

Movement is not just something our bodies do. Movement is also something we feel. In fact, movement and feelings are constantly influencing one another. A deep breath can help us feel calmer. A walk can help clear our thoughts. Celebrating a goal might make us jump, clap, smile, raise our arms, or simply sit back and feel proud. A slow stretch can be comforting. A fast game can be energizing. A favourite song can make us want to move in ways we did not expect.

Feelings do not only change movement. Movement can also change feelings. This is good news because it means movement gives us another way to care for ourselves. You do not need to be an athlete, dancer, or fitness enthusiast to experience this connection.

Whether you are:

- rolling
- walking
- dancing
- stretching
- gardening
- playing
- reaching
- exercising
- breathing

your movements can influence how you feel.



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The goal is not to feel happy all the time. The goal is to become more aware of the relationship between movement and emotion.

Some days movement may help us feel:

- calmer
- stronger
- more focused
- more connected
- more confident
- more joyful

Other days movement may give us a safe way to release:

- frustration
- stress
- worry
- tension
- sadness

There are no right or wrong emotions. There are only opportunities to notice what movement is helping us feel today.

As one participant in our InterActive for Life research shared:

I love moving to music, to sound, and just going with the beat and how it makes you feel. I don't think that we should worry about whether we're doing everything perfectly. I don't worry about it. Just go with it. You make mistakes, you do things not quite correctly. That's the least of your worries- whether you're going to do everything perfectly, right. Just enjoy moving with the music. Everybody has big smiles on their faces when the music is playing.

Her joy is contagious and may be viewed in the [“Joy in Active Aging”](#) YouTube video.

An attitude shift we may adopt after learning about this experience is this: What if movement wasn't something we did to get somewhere? What if movement was also a way to feel something?

The next time you move, ask yourself:

"How do I want to feel?"

Then notice whether your movement helps you get there.

Instructor Activities

TO EXPLORE FEELINGS IN ACTION

1

Start with Feelings

Before an activity begins, ask participants:

"How would you like to feel by the end of today's session?"

Possible answers:

- energized
- calm
- stronger
- connected
- relaxed
- confident

Reflection

How often do we talk about feelings as outcomes of movement instead of just physical outcomes?



Instructor Activities

TO EXPLORE FEELINGS IN ACTION

2 Teach Movement Qualities

Invite participants to explore movement qualities. For example, can you move:

- slowly?
- quickly?
- softly?
- strongly?
- smoothly?
- sharply?
- lightly?
- powerfully?

Reflection

How does changing the quality of movement influence the atmosphere of the activity?



Instructor Activities

TO EXPLORE FEELINGS IN ACTION

3 Notice What Movement Feels Like

When teaching movement, it can be easy to focus on external outcomes such as:

- speed
- strength
- endurance
- performance
- technique

Yet movement is also an emotional experience.

People may leave an activity remembering less about what they achieved and more about how they felt.

Challenge

Look for signs that participants are becoming more aware of the relationship between movement and emotion.

Notice when participants:

- recognize a change in mood
- use movement to feel calmer or more energized
- become more comfortable expressing themselves
- show joy, curiosity, confidence, or playfulness
- discover a movement that helps them feel good

Instructor Activities

TO EXPLORE FEELINGS IN ACTION

3 Notice What Movement Feels Like

Examples

Instead of only praising what people do, acknowledge how movement is influencing their experience:

- ☐ "You seem more relaxed than when we started."
- ☐ "I can see your confidence growing."
- ☐ "That movement looks like it feels good for you."
- ☐ "You found a rhythm that works for you."
- ☐ "I noticed a lot more smiles during that activity."
- ☐ "You seem really present and engaged."
- ☐ "I can see people bringing different emotions into their movement today."
- ☐ "That looks like a movement that helps you feel energized."
- ☐ "You seem more comfortable expressing yourself through movement."
- ☐ "I like how you're paying attention to how your body and mood are responding."

Reflection

How did participants appear to be feeling?

What emotions seemed to emerge or change during the activity?

How did the movement contribute to those emotional experiences?

Instructor Activities

TO EXPLORE FEELINGS IN ACTION

4

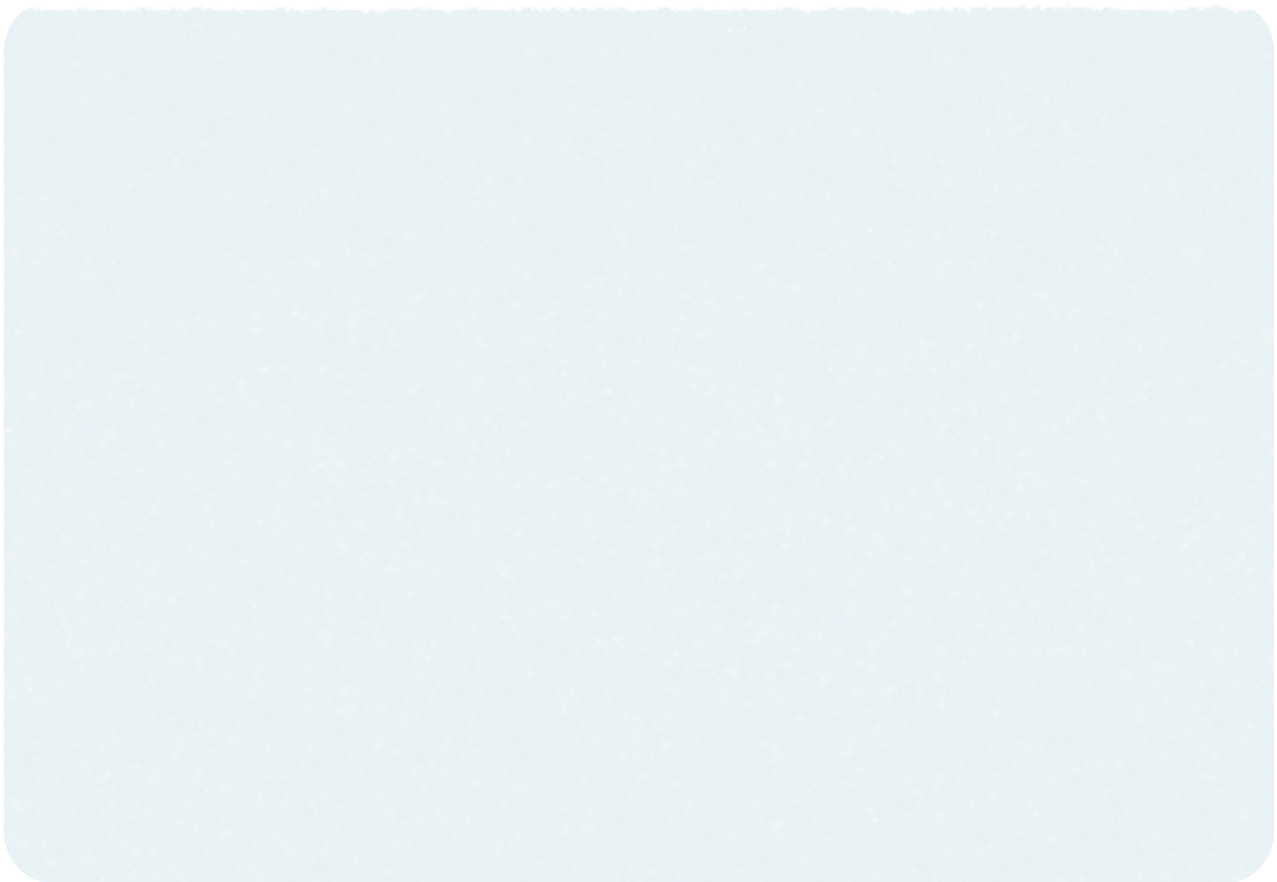
Notice The Emotional Climate

During an activity, pause and observe:

- Are people smiling?
- Are people relaxed?
- Are people engaged?
- Are people withdrawn?
- Are people supporting one another?
- Is the energy matching the goals of the activity?

Reflection

What emotions seem to be present in the room?



Instructor Activities

TO EXPLORE FEELINGS IN ACTION

5

Invite Expression

Instead of saying:

✗ "Copy me."

Try:

- ✓ "Find your own version."
- ✓ "Show me what this movement feels like."
- ✓ "How would you express this movement?"
- ✓ "Can you add your own style?"

Challenge

Count how many opportunities participants have to express themselves during the session.

InterActive For Life

MESSAGE

- Every movement has a feeling.
- Every feeling can influence movement.
- The more aware we become of this relationship, the more tools we have to support our wellbeing.
- Movement is not only something we do with our body.
- Movement is also something we experience.

Key Takeaway

Movement does more than change our bodies.

Movement can change the way we feel.

When we become curious about the emotions within movement, we discover new ways to care for ourselves and connect with others.

Congratulations!

You have explored ways to:

- ✓ Notice how movement influences your emotions
- ✓ Use movement to support your mood
- ✓ Express feelings through movement
- ✓ Create your own movement–emotion toolkit
- ✓ Help others experience movement in personally meaningful ways

InterActive for Life Reminder

NOTICE. MOVE. FEEL.

Every movement tells a story.

Every feeling has a place.

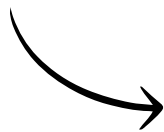
Keep moving with curiosity.





Curious for more?

- [Quick tips for physical activity participants](#)
- [Complete the InterActive for Life Inventory](#)



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