



# Integrative Mindful Exposure – Emotional Surfing 1

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[emotional exposure](#), [mindful](#), [mindfulness exercise](#), [psychotherapy](#)

Just as it is senseless to attempt to surf against a wave, fighting against the stream of emotions would be equally futile. So it only makes sense to surf with the wave and let nature take its course. I have developed a technique which I term *Emotional Surfing* which incorporates critical elements of mindfulness and behavioral exposure. In this technique we are asked to mindfully view and label potentially uncomfortable mental images, feeling states, memories and thoughts. Guided by behavioral learning principles, we are encouraged to hold these mental cues in our attention for sufficient

time to allow some degree of habituation and extinction to occur. Also, memory and other associational reactivations will occur following principles of “evaporation and transpiration” that I will discuss in a future post.

One is asked to close their eyes and bring their attention to a difficult emotion, memory, image, or whatever it is that is a contemporary source of pain that they tend to bury, repress, avoid or otherwise control. It is also very critical to try to identify a physical point of emanation from which the emotion resonates. So, in other words, someone might identify as they focus on a difficult feeling, sensations arising from their abdomen, or solar plexus, throat area and so on. Most typically, feelings arise out of specific energy centers or “chakras” as they are known in the east. As the individual continues to focus on the emotion/image/memory and the associated bodily area, they will see that often quite quickly, the quality of each changes. So, for example if one is experiencing fear or anxiety in their chest, it will quickly and spontaneously morph into another feeling and bodily location. Feelings of anger may well up, or helplessness, shame or any one of a host of feelings and accompanying images and memories may surface with accompanying resonating physical sensations.

The key elements of emotional surfing are fourfold:

- 1) focus upon and hold a painful image, memory, thought or feeling.
- 2) label as specifically as possible the feeling(s) that arise.
- 3) take note and hold your attention at the bodily area from where the present feelings emanate.
- 4) pay careful attention to how the emotions, images, and physical sensations change and move as you maintain focus.



Caution – Not everyone can do this on their own. Some may require the perceived safety and support of doing this in a therapeutic context. If one has a history of psychotic symptoms or has difficulty at times differentiating their internal reality, from external reality, than guidance and supervision may be advisable.

As individuals practice this techniques they will witness that can more easily “let go” and watch as nature takes its course. The point of this exercise is not to put an end to emotional pain. Pain is an inherent part of life. Suffering arises as a function of our resistance to pain. The idea is to be able to relinquish our control endeavors, so that we can move with our pain, and gain acceptance of wherever we are without effort or resistance. We can quickly come to learn that it is not dangerous to experience any part of ourselves. We learn that like the tides, feelings come and go of their own accord. And by riding with them, we can tap the special power, and knowledge that they can bestow.

In the next blog, I will provide an example of Emotional Surfing drawing from a case sample.

Please leave comments to this and other blogs so that this can become a richer experience for all. You can also contact me privately if you have questions or comments that you’d prefer not to disclose publicly.

Happy surfing!