

## About Focusing by Emily Agnew

**Focusing is an inner skill based on the philosophy that each human being is really a “human becoming.”** When you think about it, this makes sense. You are constantly in process, on every level. Each of your cells contains countless processes. Your respiratory and digestive systems are processes. Your emotions, your relationships, and your growth and maturation as a person are always in process.

**But what if your processes don’t get what they need to be able to move forward in their natural way?** If you feel stuck, limited, or in pain, that means a process got stopped in you somewhere. These stoppages, or traumas, limit your life in some way. And big life stoppages can limit your life in a big way.

**Focusing helps you be with yourself in such a way that these stopped places in you can now move forward.** When you enter a Focusing way of being, you move beyond what you consciously know. From this place of not-knowing, you can sense what wants to come next.

**This “what wants to come next” could be an insight, a realization, a shift of perspective, or an action.** But whatever form it takes, this “next thing” is accompanied by an *unmistakable sense of rightness*. This rightness is quite physical and satisfying, as when you finally remember where you put your keys and feel that “Oh! *That’s* where they are!”

### Why does this matter?

**Sometimes we can’t think or talk our way out of stuck places.** Focusing gives you the power to go beyond your habitual patterns of thinking and acting. As you learn to be present with yourself in this deep way, your inner blocks dissolve and you find more and more freedom to be truly yourself, moment by moment. When you Focus, you empower yourself to make choices and take actions in integrity with yourself.

**Focusing is a particular gift for sensitive people.** If you are sensitive, you already sense all sorts of subtle things going on in yourself. It’s how you are wired. But you may have learned along the way to ignore or dismiss these subtle, vague, or uncertain body senses, not knowing that they were in truth the gateway to your most significant needs, concerns, and insights. Focusing gives you a powerful tool to be with these fuzzy, unclear “somethings”, bringing you the deep relief that comes as you reconnect to the wisdom of your embodied knowing.

**Focusing is also a powerful tool to make decisions.** Your life is composed of countless daily decisions. And when you face the kind of complex, nuanced decision for which there is no one right answer, you quickly exhaust the limits of your intellect.

**When this happens, you can go over and over what you consciously know, without further insight arising.** Or you can turn to Focusing to access the vast intelligence held in your body about the issue, known as the *whole felt sense* of the issue. This felt sense includes everything you consciously know, but it also contains much more than that, including the implied past and the implied future. As you hold this whole felt sense, you get new clarity and direction.

## **Where did Focusing come from?**

**We have a University of Chicago philosopher and psychologist named Eugene Gendlin to thank for identifying Focusing and figuring out a way to teach it.** In the early 1950's, Gendlin assisted his mentor, Carl Rogers, in conducting a large-scale study that analyzed the factors influencing therapy outcomes.

**Gendlin and his team were startled and chagrined to discover they could predict a therapy client's likelihood of success from the first session.** Analyzing the data, they were forced to acknowledge that the skill of the therapist was not the primary factor influencing the success of the therapy. This flew in the face of all previous assumptions.

**If therapist skill wasn't creating client success, then what was?** Gendlin and his colleagues discovered that the key contributor to better therapy outcomes was *the client's ability to refer freshly to something in them*. Gendlin named this "something" the client's "*felt experiencing*." And he observed that some clients seemed instinctively to know how to sense and be with their felt experiencing.

**At key moments, these more successful clients would slow down and stop talking.** They'd fumble for words, evidently trying to describe something they sensed inside themselves. They'd create unusual phrases to try to describe what they were experiencing. Instead of *talking about* or *analyzing* their problems, they *describe the embodied felt sense* of their inner experience.

**Gendlin was excited to observe that when clients finally found words that described their present-moment inner experience, they'd get visible, audible shifts.** They'd say things like, "Oh! *That's it!*" They'd sigh deeply, or shed tears, or show some kind of obvious physical release which left them with a new sense of possibility.

**Gendlin identified the steps that made up this inner skill, and he named it Focusing.** He perceived the power of Focusing to contribute to human growth and well-being. So he developed a way to teach people how to access their *felt experiencing* of an issue or situation.

**Now, Focusing is used not only for emotional healing, but also in a variety of fields requiring creativity and complex problem-solving.** Gendlin taught Focusing as a six-step process. Since then, Ann Weiser Cornell and Barbara McGavin, students of Gendlin, have developed a new way of teaching Focusing called Inner Relationship Focusing. (I completed the Inner Relationship Focusing certification in 2013, and now teach on the certification faculty). With its keen sensitivity to the subtleties of language, Inner Relationship Focusing is a particularly good fit for sensitive people.

## **Do you know what it feels like to focus?**

**If you meditate, then you've most likely gotten at least a glimpse of something vast beyond your thinking brain.** But whether you meditate or not, have you ever sensed there was something bothering you about a situation, and you wondered what it was? If so, you may have had an inner conversation with yourself:

“Something about this is really bothering me. Is it because she \_\_\_\_\_?...no, that's not it...Oh! It's because *she didn't ask me first!* That's it. I'd have been OK with it if she had just asked me first...”

**This is the feel of Focusing: paying attention, wondering, describing until you feel that body shift to “Oh! That's it!”** And you can learn to invite and be with all kinds of subtle or complex issues to get these kinds of shifts.

**It's easiest to get the feel of Focusing by experiencing the process in a 1:1 session with an experienced guide.** As you get the feel of the process, you can begin to do it on your own. But the very best way to enjoy the benefits of Focusing long-term is to learn to do Focusing with other trained Focusing partners. Focusing partnership is powerful form of lifelong mutual support which is [a godsend for sensitive people](#). With the combined options of solo Focusing, Focusing partnership, and guided Focusing sessions, you can get support for a full range of issues, from the every-day to the most intense.

*Emily Agnew is a certified Focusing Trainer. She offers 1: 1 sessions and teaches Focusing partnership classes designed specifically for sensitive people. Her sessions and programs at [Sustainably Sensitive](#) incorporate Focusing and Inner Bonding to help you break free from anxiety and shame. To learn more, please visit [www.sustainablysensitive.com/services](http://www.sustainablysensitive.com/services).*

### **References:**

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