

Learning Focusing: The Classic Six Steps

Most people find it easier to learn Focusing through individual instruction than through simply reading about it. The classic six steps defined by Eugene Gendlin in his 1978 book *Focusing* are offered here as a starting point for understanding the process.

Although these steps may provide a window into Focusing, it is important to remember that they are not *the* way to do Focusing. Indeed most teachers have developed their own styles of teaching Focusing which don't conform to these specific steps. Focusing has no rigid, fixed agenda for the inner world; many Focusing sessions bear little resemblance to the technical process that we define here.

So we offer to you six steps with the caveat that it is a scaffolding for you to use for as long as it's useful. As you grow in your practice and experience our many different teachers, you will probably move beyond these steps to allow a more fluid process that suits you.

What follows is a lightly edited excerpt from The Focusing Manual, chapter four of *Focusing* by Eugene Gendlin.

The inner act of Focusing can be broken down into six main sub-acts or movements. As you gain more practice, you won't need to think of these as six separate parts of the process. To think of them as separate movements makes the process seem more mechanical than it is—or will be, for you, later. I have subdivided the process in this way because I've learned from years of experimenting that this is one of the effective ways to teach Focusing to people who have never tried it before.

Think of this as only the basics. As you progress and learn more about Focusing you will add to these basic instructions, clarify them, and approach them from other angles. Eventually—perhaps not the first time you go through it—you will have the experience of something shifting inside.

So here are the Focusing instructions in brief form, manual style. If you want to try them out, do so easily, gently. If you find difficulty in one step or another, don't push too hard; just move on to the next one. You can always come back.

Clearing A Space

What I will ask you to do will be silent, just to yourself. Take a moment just to relax . . . All right—now, inside you, I would like you to pay attention inwardly, in your body, perhaps in your stomach or chest. Now see what comes *there* when you ask, "How is my life going? What is the main thing for me right now?" Sense within your body. Let the answers come slowly from this sensing. When some concern comes, DO NOT GO INSIDE IT. Stand back, say "Yes, that's there. I can feel that, there." Let there be a little space between you and that. Then ask what else you feel. Wait again, and sense. Usually there are several things.

Felt Sense

From among what came, select one personal problem to focus on. DO NOT GO INSIDE IT. Stand back from it. Of course, there are many parts to that one thing you are thinking about—too many to think of each one alone. But you can *feel* all of these things together. Pay attention there where you usually feel things, and in there you can get a sense of what *all of the problem* feels like. Let yourself feel the unclear sense of *all of that*.

Handle

What is the quality of this unclear felt sense? Let a word, a phrase, or an image come up from the felt sense itself. It might be a quality-word, like *tight, sticky, scary, stuck, heavy, jumpy* or a phrase, or an image. Stay with the quality of the felt sense till something fits it just right.

Resonating

Go back and forth between the felt sense and the word (phrase, or image). Check how they resonate with each other. See if there is a little bodily signal that lets you know there is a fit. To do it, you have to have the felt sense there again, as well as the word. Let the felt sense change, if it does, and also the word or picture, until they feel just right in capturing the quality of the felt sense.

Asking

Now ask: what is it, about this whole problem, that makes this quality (which you have just named or pictured)? Make sure the quality is sensed again, freshly, vividly (not just remembered from before). When it is here again, tap it, touch it, be with it, asking, "What makes the whole problem so _____?" Or you ask, "What is in *this* sense?"

If you get a quick answer without a shift in the felt sense, just let that kind of answer go by. Return your attention to your body and freshly find the felt sense again. Then ask it again.

Be with the felt sense till something comes along with a shift, a slight "give" or release.

Receiving

Receive whatever comes with a shift in a friendly way. Stay with it a while, even if it is only a slight release. Whatever comes, this is only one shift; there will be others. You will probably continue after a little while, but stay here for a few moments.

IF DURING THESE INSTRUCTIONS SOMEWHERE YOU HAVE SPENT A LITTLE WHILE SENSING AND TOUCHING AN UNCLEAR HOLISTIC BODY SENSE OF THIS PROBLEM, THEN YOU HAVE FOCUSED. It doesn't matter whether the body-shift came or not. It comes on its own. We don't control that.

Instructions For Not Following Instructions

Isn't it wrong to publish instructions for inward personal process?

One danger with a set of instructions is that people might use them to close off other ways. Anything human involves more than one method. Please notice, we don't say that this method is all you need or might find valuable. Had we said that, we hope you would have thought us stupid.

Anything you learn here can go well with anything else that you may find helpful. If there seems to be a contradiction, go easy. Let your own steps find the way to reconcile the contradiction.

There are other reasons one might not like specifics, such as these steps. Instructions may seem to diminish mystery and openness, although that is not so.

Also, written instructions cannot avoid misunderstandings. No formula fits every person. Anyway, one must find one's own path.

These problems occur with all types of knowledge about humans.

Adopt a "split-level" approach to all instructions: On the one hand follow the instructions exactly, so that you can discover the experiences to which they point. On the other hand be sensitive to yourself and your own body. Assume that only sound expansive experiences are worth having. *The moment doing it feels wrong in your body, stop following the instruction, and back up slightly. Stay there with your attention until you can sense exactly what is going wrong.*

These are very exact instructions for how not to follow instructions!

And, of course, they apply to themselves, as well.

In this way you will find your own body's steps, either through the instructions, or through what is wrong with them.

Focusing is always like that: You don't push on if it doesn't feel right, *but you don't run away either.* You go no further, but you back up only a little, so that *you stay until what is in the way becomes clear.*

Focusing is quite safe. It may not work but it is not negative. So, if you sense something that does not feel life-forwarding and sound in your body, sense what that is until that opens.

But isn't it the height of self-contradiction to give exact steps for how not to follow instructions? Indeed. One often needs several attitudes at once.

In a society increasingly skilled at human processes, of course we share the specifics we learn. Shall we teach the specifics of driving a car and not the specifics of finding and opening the bodily felt sense? But, human processes do give rise to more different specifics than can be logically consistent. Human nature is not fixed and not knowable in some single system. That is fortunate. No knowledge can push you out of the driver's seat of your life. Especially not our knowledge here, which is to be about finding *your own process!*

Therefore this knowledge, here, must arrange for itself to be superseded by you, as you sense for what feels sound, inside you. Instructions for not following instructions are the essence of Focusing—one's own inwardly opening steps.

If you stop and sense what's wrong at any point, and if you wait there until that opens and reveals itself, you can make good use of all sorts of methods and instructions. You do any method better than its authors can arrange.