

## How do I feel about that?

Written by Timothy Houston  
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Communication within relationships can be challenging. Sometimes the intent of the message gets lost between "what I said," and "what I heard you say." To be effective at bridging this gap, we need to use every tool available to us. Some years ago, I learned a powerful communication technique that I think will be helpful in accomplishing this goal. This technique involves written communication followed by an oral discussion. The writing and discussion are both based on a statement called the "How did I feel about that" or "HDIFAT" statement.

This tool can be used to improve communication around an emotionally charged discussion, or to even the communication playing field by allowing both parties to have an equal say. First, participants should agree on a topic statement to start the written expression of "How do I feel about that." The topic statement can be something as simple as, "You never answer your cell phone when we are together." How do I feel about that?

After the topic has been established, each participant must go into separate rooms to write down how they felt about the statement. The writing should not be done in the same room because the presence of the other person may take away from the effectiveness of the exercise. If one person finishes quickly, the other individual may feel as though they have to rush to get their thoughts on paper. A time limit of 15 - 30 minutes should be established up front, after which the parties should meet up to exchange their papers so the other person can read their response. Responses should be read twice, once for content and the second time for feeling.

Next, participants should discuss how they felt about what they just read. They should use "I feel" statements (expression of feeling) over "I feel that" statements (expression of an opinion). Because we are the owners of our feelings, "you make me feel" statements should also be eliminated. After one party has shared, the listening party should begin their response with "What I heard you say is" statement. This should be repeated until what is being said, and what is being heard is agreed upon.

Finally, participants should dispose of the papers. They are not tools to be used at a later discussion. Remember to always be mindful of the feelings of the other person. Two important factors should be kept in mind. One, people are more important than feelings. You should never use any type of communication to win the battle at the expense of losing the other person. Two, feelings are more important than the events that caused them. The details of the event are secondary to how the person felt about it. You are not trying to prove your point, but rather to create a healthy outlet for sharing feelings. Also bear in mind that the other person involved is someone you care about, and their feelings are just as important and valid as yours.

Effective communication is not an easy task. HDIFAT is a powerfully tool. It has the power to bridge the great communication divide. Tools that help develop clear honest, open channel for communication are needed. The "HDIFAT" technique is an also excellent way to get couples who may have a difficult time discussing sensitive issues to begin talking during their alone time. This simple exercise presents an opportunity to clear up misunderstanding and miscommunication.

Timothy Houston is an author, minister, and motivational speaker who is committed to guiding positive life changes in families and communities. For questions, comments or more

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