

## CHARLES L. GUSTAFSON, M.A., MFCC

---

599 S. Barranca Av. Rm 224  
Covina, Ca. 91723  
Phone 626-966-2662

FAMILY COUNSELING  
INDIVIDUAL COUNSELING  
Heart and Mind

### THOUGHTS VS. FEELINGS

Thinking and feeling lie at opposite ends of the spectrum. Human Beings are capable of either thinking or feeling, but usually not at the same time. Many people tend to confuse the two processes. It is not uncommon to hear feelings couched as thoughts and thoughts presented as feelings. Although there are obvious exceptions, thoughts may be seen as arising from the brain (above the neck) while feelings arise from the body (below the neck). A thought is something that one generates while a feeling is something one experiences. Many, if not most, thoughts may be generated automatically (see Conscious-Unconscious). Our opinions and beliefs are thoughts and tend to be products of our upbringing. This includes racial attitudes and political biases. There is a tendency to simply adopt the beliefs and attitudes of the people we were surrounded with as children.

Thoughts are appraisals or opinions of what we perceive or experience. They act as explanations to help us understand our world. Not understanding what is happening around us leaves us feeling helpless, vulnerable and frustrated, which we find unpleasant. Understanding gives us a sense of competence or mastery that is comforting.

Emotions happen in response to thoughts or perceptions. If I think that I am a worthy person who is loved and valued, I will feel good about myself and the world I live in. If I think that I am unworthy and have nothing to offer others, I am apt to feel unhappy and hopeless and may become depressed. Although the process is largely automatic, our feelings follow our thoughts. The good news here is that we are, in fact, in charge of how we feel.

As either a thought or a feeling becomes more intense, the other function fades. Thus, when feeling anything intensely, it becomes difficult to think or concentrate. A person with a car parked on their foot would have great trouble doing an exercise in mathematics. Similarly, someone lost in a problem solving exercise might forget the pain in their knee. That is why a hobby or other interest can provide such relief from the stresses of a complicated world.

One can learn to notice when one is thinking and when one is feeling. Each is appropriate in different situations. Communicating with loved ones works better when feelings are dominant, with a bit of thinking, such as “I will never call my wife bad names, even when I’m angry, because I love her”. Business transactions, on the other hand, require mostly thinking, with the feeling of trust (or mistrust) as a helpful guide to be checked with as needed. Identifying our thoughts and feelings accurately is part of living a full and satisfying life.