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## About Margarita Tartakovsky, M.S.



Margarita Tartakovsky, M.S., is an Associate Editor at Psych Central. She also explores self-image issues on her own blog [Weightless](#) and creativity on her blog [Make a Mess: Everyday Creativity](#).

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Jacobs concludes the chapter with a powerful thought: Getting distance from your feelings can help you "survey your situation with greater breadth and flexibility, and that, in turn, can help you feel calmer and allow you to make better decisions."

### **Defining Your Emotions**

According to Jacobs, naming a feeling "encloses the feeling instead of allowing it to enclose you like an invisible vapor." It also can "contain and quiet a feeling."

Feelings consist of thought processes, sensory experiences (such as irritating sounds), and physical sensations (such as muscle tension or your heart rate).

In one activity, Jacobs suggests readers think of an emotion and describe these three parts. For instance, when you're sad, what thoughts, memories or statements come to mind; what sensory experiences do you have; and what physical sensations do you experience?

In another activity, readers learn to define their feelings even further by completing the following sentences for basic emotions: happiness, sadness, fear, longing and humiliation.

If this feeling was a color, it would be \_\_\_\_\_

If this feeling was weather, it would be \_\_\_\_\_

If this feeling was a landscape, it would be \_\_\_\_\_

If this feeling was music, it would sound like  
\_\_\_\_\_

If this feeling was an object, it would be \_\_\_\_\_

These exercises help to sharpen your awareness, so you can notice even the most subtle signs of a feeling. The earlier you can name an emotion, the sooner you can intervene.

### **Further Reading**

Jacobs features several sample exercises on her website, along with her list of recommended resources on journaling and coping with emotions.



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the middle of it.”

Gaining distance, Jacobs writes, occurs with time and a different perspective. Time doesn’t heal unacknowledged emotions, she notes. But the key is to realize that feelings are fleeting. So if you’re incredibly sad right now, there was and will be a time when you’ll feel excited, relaxed or happy.

One way to practice this idea is to write about a good experience. Not only does this remind you that there’s life beyond bad feelings, but it also serves as an emotional anchor, according to Jacobs.

“Your memory can become a positive emotional reference point, to remind you of your range of possibilities when you are at your worst, feeling rotten and hopeless. When you describe a happy memory in your journal, you will be mentally reinforcing that memory so that it might occur to you later, in difficult times.”

You can try the following exercise to access that anchor.

I remember a good feeling \_\_\_\_\_ [when]. I simply felt \_\_\_\_\_ [describe the feeling in a few words]. I was \_\_\_\_\_ [where], and I remember noticing \_\_\_\_\_ [something sensory]. It was a time in my life when I was doing \_\_\_\_\_ [an activity or a general description]. I’ll never forget \_\_\_\_\_ [people, weather, environment, etc.] around me. I’ll never be right there again but I know I CAN feel that way again.

After writing out your memory, Jacobs encourages readers to think about what you usually feel like when you’re overwhelmed. Then reread your good memory. For a few times go back and forth between the overwhelming memory and the positive memory. This helps to create an association between the two.

The second part of gaining distance, according to Jacobs, is “knowing that your feelings are only one possible reaction to a situation and not the only ‘right’ reaction.”

To illustrate that, pick three people: someone who knows you well; an acquaintance; and someone who makes you feel uncomfortable.

Write down their names. Next, describe or comment on a major life event from each person’s perspective. (Or you can describe yourself in each person’s voice.) Try to really put yourself in the person’s shoes by capturing their voice.

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Sometimes, it can feel like your emotions are doing all the talking. Like a particularly powerful emotion is the driver and you're sitting bewildered in the backseat.

But you can learn to cope with your emotions in a healthy way. In fact, there are many methods to effectively manage your emotions.

Journaling is one of them.

"Journals are like a checkpoint between your emotions and the world," writes clinical psychologist Beth Jacobs, Ph.D, in her valuable workbook *Writing for Emotional Balance: A Guided Journal to Help You Manage Overwhelming Emotions*.

Journaling helps you make sense of your emotions, pinpoint patterns and gain relief. Research has shown that it also helps you reduce stress, solve problems more effectively and even improve your health.

In *Writing for Emotional Balance*, Jacobs lays out seven skills of emotion management: distancing yourself from your emotions; defining what emotions mean for you; releasing stuck emotions; learning to focus while experiencing overwhelming emotions; using organization to clarify emotions; regrouping after you've had an emotional setback; and maintaining your new skills.

Today, I'd like to share her tips for distancing yourself from your emotions and defining them.

### **Distancing Yourself from Your Emotions**

According to Jacobs, gaining distance from your emotions is vital because "...You can't see or understand something if you are right in





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## **4 Journaling Exercises to Help You Manage Your Emotions**

By Margarita Tartakovsky, M.S.

*Associate Editor*

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